"Steven Hassan's approach is one that I value more than that of any other researcher or clinical practitioner. Hassan is a model of clear exposition, his original ideas are brilliantly presented in a captivating style. I am confident that readers of his new book will share my enthusiasm for what this author tells us about how to deal with the growing menace of undue social influence and cults."

Philip G. Zimbardo, Ph.D. President of the American Psychological Association (2002)
Professor Emeritus of Psychology, Stanford University,
President and Founder of the Heroic Imagination Project

FREEDOM OF MIND

Helping Loved Ones Leave Controlling People, Cults and Beliefs

STEVEN HASSAN

America's Leading Cult Expert

Praise for

Freedom of Mind

"Steven Hassan is one of our most eloquent defenders of freedom of the mind. For decades he has labored mightily on behalf of the majesty of the human spirit. His good work has brought psychological and spiritual relief to countless victims and families across the globe that have unknowingly stumbled into the clutches of mind control perpetrators. As a spokesperson for the ordinary individual's right to be the master of his or her own thoughts and choices, Hassan has survived the dangers and threats manufactured by manipulators who have sought to silence his courage. His new book will bring special hope for current victims, but it should be read by anyone who values the privacy and sanctity of his or her own personality."

> Alan W. Scheflin, Professor of Law; Santa Clara University, Coauthor of *The Mind Manipulators and Memory, Trauma Treatment, and the Law*; Recipient of sixteen awards in the fields of mental health and human rights.

"When I was growing up with a guru in the house, I wish I had access to someone like Steve Hassan. He just knows more about this than anyone else. He is wise, compassionate, fair and effective. I loved this new book. Read it and listen to him!"

> Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson, Author of *When Elephants Weep, Against Therapy* and *My Father's Guru*

"The essence of Steve Hassan's work is the liberation of the human potential in all of us. Can anyone of us be really free when others are enslaved? Steve's emphatic "no" to this agonizing question makes *Freedom of Mind* a vibrant tool for so many of us in the helping professions. As a rabbi and teacher, I am always inspired by Steve Hassan's integrity and determination. Let it continue for many years."

> Moshe Waldoks, Ph.D. Rabbi, *Temple Beth Zion, Brookline, MA* and Author of *The Big Book of Jewish Humor*

"With *Freedom of Mind*, Steve Hassan has provided a reasoned, principled, and highly readable approach to attacking a serious social problem. We need this book!"

Robert B. Cialdini, Ph.D. Author of *Influence, Founder of Influenceatwork.com*

"When Steve Hassan was still a high ranking member in the Unification Church, I participated in an unsuccessful voluntary deprogramming of my daughter, Barbara. For two days the team leader pounded at the cult member and her group. Deliberately, he insulted them using bathroom language on the theory that the cult member would 'snap.' We failed. As she returned to her group the cultist remarked, "Where was the love?" If the team leader and the cult member had had the opportunity to read Hassan's *Freedom of Mind: Helping Loved Ones Leave Controlling People, Cults and Beliefs*, the results might have been quite different. Hassan has skillfully condensed his more than 36 years of experience in liberating members of destructive groups into a valuable workbook for counselors, cult members and their families, and mental health professionals. His formula, the Strategic Interactive Approach, stresses love, respect, freedom of choice, customized planned action fitted to the individual with the family as key participants, psychotherapy, and applied social psychology."

Arthur A. Dole, Ph.D, ABPP. Emeritus Professor, Former Member Board of Directors International Cultic Studies Association

"*Freedom of Mind* is a compassionate and intelligent guide for anyone who has ever been caught up in a cult or cult-like organization. Hassan offers perceptive and non-coercive guidance to family and friends of those whose idealism or vulnerability has led them to become cult members. Further, the book provides valuable insights into the control and manipulation that can occur in abusive personal relationships such as those experienced by battered women. It is a vital tool for professionals and laypersons alike."

Peter R. Breggin, M.D. Author of *Psychiatric Drug Withdrawal* and *Medication Madness: The Role of Psychiatric Drugs in Cases of Violence, Suicide and Crime*

"Three decades ago, Steve was the most significant innovator of exit-

counseling. His first book was the best general introduction to the subject, but rather than resting on his laurels, he continued to expand his thinking, to our great benefit. This book represents an even better approach to indoctrination and exploitative persuasion. Steve is one of a handful of true experts on the terrible problems posed by destructive groups. It has been my good fortune to know him these many years and I can attest that his integrity and courage are unswerving, despite the extreme pressures of such work. Anyone who has been involved should put aside the prejudices instilled by their group and read this book. For that matter, as every life is now touched by fanaticism, everyone should read and discuss the compelling ideas that Steve puts forward here."

Jon Atack, Author *A Piece of Blue Sky*; *Voodoo Child (Slight Return)*; and *Waking Reason* (work in progress)

"At the time I left the headquarters of Jehovah's Witnesses in New York, after having worked for $14 a month for 6 years, I was able through much inner soul-searching to extricate myself on my own. Had I possessed the information in *Freedom of Mind* more than likely it would have greatly shortened the amount of time spent still searching for answers. When you are the one being manipulated by controlling leadership, you are least likely to understand the motives behind that leadership, as it is carefully cloaked behind doctrine, fear and guilt. Steve's SIA approach can give loved ones guidance on how to communicate effectively to people in cults like the Jehovah's Witnesses. The book may also be so helpful to those in destructive groups who are starting to question. No one can shortcut the process significantly and recover without fear of returning to the group, or of being caught up in another high-control group."

Randall Watters, Author of "Thus Saith Jehovah's Witnesses."

"Congratulations, Steve! You have a unique guidebook here that should help free many people from the bondage of mind control. It will give hope and motivation to their many relatives and friends who feel helpless and hopeless and are desperate to discover some means of reaching their loved one. I remember the dark depressive cloud of despair that settled on me when I first heard of my son Peter's involvement in Scientology. What a tremendous relief it was when his wife Mary Jo reassured us that he had responded positively to your counseling and had re-entered the real world.

It is good that you affirm consistently the importance of an individual's faith — you make it clear that no Christian should fear that your methods or

techniques would impact the cult member's religious faith negatively. You are unselfishly sharing what you know with others, and encouraging them to try it. The Moonies would have undoubtedly left you alone, had they any idea what your indoctrination would eventually lead to! God works in mysterious ways."

Joyce Farrell, Mother of ex-Scientologist

"We've known Steve Hassan personally, and his work, for over 25 years. Many times we have talked and shared information about particular gurus and cults as we are aligned in believing that healthy spirituality requires personal integrity and social responsibility. In 1989 we asked for his feedback on our booklet on gurus. He was so impressed that he said we should expand it into a book. The resulting book, *The Guru Papers: Masks of Authoritarian Power* (1993), has become a classic in helping free people from authoritarian teachers and groups. Steve Hassan has been at the forefront of investigating cults, cult behavior, and successfully deprogramming many of those ensnared. He has shown the very real dangers that cults bring to individuals and society. His dedication to freeing people from insidious mind control has been his focus for 36 years. So we are pleased to support him and his new book *Freedom of Mind: Helping Loved Ones Leave Controlling People, Cults and Beliefs*."

Joel Kramer & Diana Alstad, co-authors of *The Guru Papers: Masks of Authoritarian Power*

"*Freedom of Mind: Helping Loved Ones Leave Controlling People, Cults and Beliefs* is an important contribution to understanding the insidious threat of undue social influence and destructive cult indoctrination. It is a manual of how to ethically help people who are deeply involved to engage in a process of reality-testing and making their own independent decisions. It is highly recommended to anyone who supports freedom and celebrates creative intelligence."

Stephen Lankton, LCSW, DAHB Author of *Tools of Intention*, *The Answer Within*, *Editor-in-Chief American Journal*

of Clinical Hypnosis

"Steven Hassan has called upon his thirty-six years of expertise in the cult field to write this excellent, highly readable and extremely practical manual.

Reading this book and implementing Hassan's advice will help everyone affected by a mind control situation to understand and reevaluate an unhealthy involvement."

Marcia R. Rudin, Founding Director, International Cult Education Program of the American Family Foundation, writer

"Steve Hassan was directly responsible for my exiting the Church of Scientology. I was completely inculcated and an enthusiastic adherent of the cult. I had signed away our savings, maxed out our credit cards, the down payment on our house and my kids' college fund so that I could go 'clear.' I was destined to destroy my life and that of my family (two kids with twins on the way), my business, and my friends. Scientology is a particularly difficult cult. As a matter of fact, it should be called 'The Diffi-cult.' They do not relinquish 'pre-clears,' which is what I was, easily, nor do they take kindly to people who know what their actual beliefs are. Steve knew that he would have to have assistance from former Scientologists to help break through to me. He picked the best people, and he orchestrated the intervention. I knew 30 minutes into the meeting with him and the former Scientologists that I was out of the cult, but then took 4 days of counseling to understand what had happened to me and why. It is incredibly humbling and creates a new heart within you to go through that experience. Realizing that I was lied to and manipulated made it a little easier to accept what I had done. Even more, becoming educated about mind control and hypnotic events used in the 'auditor' sessions helped me to understand my terrible choices and responses. Whether you have a loved one who is in a cult currently, or you were in a cult and didn't get proper assistance to understand what happened to you, Steve's personal counseling, as well as reading his book will make all the difference in your life and your own self-image. Please do not hesitate to call on Steve if you have questions that need answers, or know people that need help."

From the bottom of my heart,

Peter W. Farrell, DVM

Other Books by Steven Hassan

Combatting Cult Mind Control

Releasing the Bonds

FREEDOM OF MIND

Helping Loved Ones
Leave Controlling People,
Cults, and Beliefs

Steven Hassan

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1. Psychology 2. Cults 3. Recovery

4. Brainwashing 5. Deprogramming

Readers can reach Steven Hassan or The Freedom of Mind Resource Center Inc. at www.freedomofmind.com

To the spirit of Lisa McPherson*

and everyone who yearns to be free.

*See www.lisamcpherson.org

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First, and foremost, I would like to thank my parents, Milton and Estelle Hassan, for their love and support throughout my life. In May of 1976, they risked everything to rescue me from the Moon cult after a serious van crash. May they rest in peace. My sister Thea, and Doug Luba get huge thank-yous, for it was they who made the rescue possible, and more. If they had not intervened, it is possible I might still be in the cult today. I want to thank Michael Strom, Nestor Garcia, M.D., Gladys Rodriguez-Gonzales, and the late Gary Rosenberg for helping to wake me up during that fateful week of my deprogramming.

It seems like eons have passed since 1988 when I wrote *Combatting Cult Mind Control*. While it was always my intention to write other books, it took my sister, Thea Luba, to get the second book project (*Releasing the Bonds*) going. She took it upon herself to make sure the developments of my counseling approach over the past eleven years were written down and shared with a wider audience. She transcribed many hours of audio tapes of sessions with clients, read cult-related books, repeatedly interviewed me and former members and activists, attended conferences, and, generally, threw herself into understanding my world. As the project developed, and as I was able to devote more time to the writing, Thea continued to shape the material, making fundamental conceptual contributions: it was her idea to use the term "interaction approach," instead of "intervention." By forcing me to explain what I did, and why I did it, Thea helped to develop the Strategic Interactive Approach. She went beyond what a brother could ask, and I thank her deeply.

To help organize the many hundreds of pages of text into a book, I turned to Richard N. Côté and Duncan Greene. Working with extensive editorial guidance from my wife, Misia Landau, and myself, they produced a commendable draft which, over the following months, I reworked into the published book. Misia spent many hours turning my words and concepts into their present polished form. Thankfully, she is not only incredibly bright, and beautiful, and a gifted writer, she is also committed to helping my life's work. She has contributed tremendously to this book and to my life. I love her more than words can ever say.

This book was updated and revised from *Releasing the Bonds: Empowering People to Think for Themselves* (FOM 2000) and put into its current form with the help of several individuals. Many thanks to Therese Reger who worked on helping me tighten it up. It was her idea to change the term Strategic Interaction Approach to the Strategic Interactive Approach.

Special thanks to Elyse Hirschorn and Jon Atack for proofreading the manuscript. Sol Nasisi at nextbigwriter.com helped make this book a reality.

Many thanks to many people who are very important to me including; Christopher Sonn, Dr. Philip Zimbardo, Alan Scheflin, Daniel Brown, Jay Livingston, Hank Greenberg, Debra Clarke, Molly Silver, Brian Birmingham, Larry Zilliox, Bob and Judy Pardon. They helped me tremendously to make my work more effective and this book a reality.

I am also very grateful for the support of many family and friends who have helped me along the way: Doug and the entire Luba family, the Freese family, Phyllis Slotnick, Mark and Steffie Slotnick, Debbie and Mike Miron, Lauren and Danny Broch, Ricki and Dennis Grossman, Marc and Elyse Hirschorn, Michael Stone, Karen Magarian, Ron and Rebecca Cooper, Monica Weiss and Danny Hanson, Russell Backer, Gary Birns, The Bar-Yam family, Eric and Susan Rayman, Elissa Weitzman and Shep Doeleman, and all my friends at TBZ. Thank you, Misia, for supporting me and encouraging me to do what I have needed to do in my often difficult line of work. Thank you, Matthew for being the best son a man could ever ask for. I apologize if I have forgotten to mention anyone. You know who you are—and thanks so much!

Introduction

The world has changed since *Releasing the Bonds: Empowering People to Think for Themselves* was first published. Back in 1999, most Americans including myself could not have imagined the destruction and fear of 9/11, jihad, terrorism, the prevalence of religious extremism, or the many other phenomena that can make today seem like a frightening time to be alive. I have decided to do this updated and revised edition as an e-book and print on demand paperback and retitle it *Freedom of Mind: Helping Loved Ones Leave Controlling People, Cults and Beliefs.* I have made numerous substantial changes to more accurately reflect all that I have learned.

The phenomenon of destructive influence and cults of all types has not gone away. It has morphed and become much more sophisticated. Today's twenty-year-olds know little or nothing about major cult stories of past decades: Charles Manson; Jim Jones' People Temple Jonestown tragedy (they know the expression, "drink the kool-aid" though); David Koresh's Branch Davidians in Waco; Heaven's Gate mass death; Shoko Asahara's Aum Shinrikyo's sarin gassing in Japan; and Order of the Solar Temple mass deaths to name some major news stories. Mainstream media is doing less investigative reporting on destructive cults, avoiding their civic responsibility, in my opinion. Large cults have gone mainstream and become very sophisticated, hiring top law firms and lobbyists. The Internet is now the major recruitment arena. Unfortunately, sleep deprivation is rampant, making people especially vulnerable to undue social influence.

But events are happening that also make this an exciting and hopeful time. Former members of cults are putting up web sites, and are writing blogs and publishing books. Many have, like myself become mental health professionals, and have gone on to have very successful careers. As we learn more about human behavior, we enhance our ability to help people who've been recruited by controlling organizations and cults. Today we have knowledge, including neurobiology research that explains what just a few years ago would have been considered magical, occult, or satanic.

Like most of us, I knew nothing about any of these phenomena when I was recruited into the "One World Crusade," a front group for the Unification Church, better known for decades as the Moonies. I was a 19-year-old junior at Queens College in New York in February of 1974. I was an appealing target for cult recruiters as I sat in the college cafeteria and mourned the loss of my girlfriend. I was idealistic and bright, the only son of a loving middle-class family and especially vulnerable at that moment to the

smiles of three attractive women who flirted with me and invited me over for dinner.

Dinner led to longer meetings, and workshops. Within a few short weeks, I came to believe that Armageddon was at hand, World War III would start in 1977, and we Moonies were single-handedly responsible for defeating Satan and building the Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

I threw myself into the work of "saving the world," logging 18 to 21 hours a day, seven days a week, fundraising, recruiting and indoctrinating new members, organizing public relations and political campaigns, and meeting regularly with Moon and his highest-ranking lieutenants. As an American, I had no real power, just position. The upper echelons of the hierarchy were composed exclusively of Koreans and Japanese, with the Koreans in the position of the master race. Moon had moved to the United States, and he needed American front men who were intelligent, passionate and dedicated. Over a matter of months, I went from founder of a recruiting front group, C.A.R.P.[1] at my former college, to the rank of Assistant Director of the Unification Church #10 at National Headquarters in Manhattan. I was highly praised by Moon himself, and proclaimed, "the model member."

It took a miracle–disguised as an accident–to save my life. In 1976, after three days without sleep, I nodded off at the wheel of a fund-raising van and crashed into the back of an 18-wheeler. This near-fatal accident gave my family the opportunity to do a deprogramming. On the second day, I threatened my father with violence, at which point he broke down in tears and asked me what I would do if I were in his position? For a brief moment, I was able to see from his perspective, to feel his pain. I reluctantly agreed to meet with a team of former members for five days without contacting the cult or trying to escape.

As a devoted Moonie, I did my best to fight the deprogramming process. But the information gradually began to sink in. In the days that followed, I came to understand brainwashing as practiced by Mao Tse Tung in his Communist re-education centers. Robert Jay Lifton's *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism* (Norton, 1961) helped me realize that the techniques we used in the Moonies were much like those used by the Chinese Communists to make their people obedient. Eventually, after five days, I came to the painful realization that not only had I been subjected to these techniques, I had used them on others. I was horrified that I could have turned my back on my family, friends, religion, my life goals to essentially become a tool of a demagogue who wants to take over the world.

After my deprogramming, I went on to complete a master's degree in counseling psychology. From my unique position as a former cult member and counselor, I dedicated myself to helping others escape and recover from destructive situations. In 1979, following the mass suicide at Jonestown, Guyana, I founded EX-MOON Inc., a nonprofit educational organization made up of ex-members of Moon's international organization. I published a newsletter, held media conferences, and established a clearinghouse for information about the Moon organization. I later served as the national coordinator of FOCUS, a support and information network of former members of destructive cult groups. I am now directing the Freedom of Mind Resource Center, Inc. (www.freedomofmind.com), a center dedicated to helping families and individuals, and to informing the public about destructive and deceptive influence practices.

In the early 1990s, I learned that the leaders of some cults were buying copies of my first book, *Combatting Cult Mind Control*: *The #1 Best-selling Guide to Protection, Rescue and Recovery from Destructive Cults*, so they could learn how to resist the exit-counseling process. For example, Kip McKean, who founded the International Churches of Christ, reportedly held up my book at a general assembly and told some 15,000 members that it would be sinful to meet with me or even read my book.[2] In this way, cult leaders impeded the efforts of many families–but also forced me to develop more effective ways of strategically and creatively interacting with those trapped in cults. A cult member's friends and family are traumatized by the situation and, to mobilize them, I had to find ways to empower them, both as individuals and as a team. These revelations became the cornerstones of the method I call the Strategic Interactive Approach, or SIA.

This book is the culmination of 36 years of experience in helping people all over the world. It describes a practical approach to helping those affected by destructive cults. The Strategic Interactive Approach (SIA) improves upon exit counseling, and promotes a family-centered, non-coercive course of action. It provides friends and family of the cult member with a greater understanding of cult methods, and the effects of indoctrination. It offers new insight into cult-induced phobias, and effective tools for overcoming them.

The SIA is designed to help the cult member recognize that he has been under the influence of the group and eventually, to recognize the pervasiveness of the group's control over his life. Once the former member has experienced such an awakening, my methods help him regain a sense of personal power, integrity, and direction. Most cult members I have worked with have experienced emotional, psychological and even spiritual

rebirth. They were able to return to their families and were spared further injury or possibly even death.

This goal-oriented communication course is not meant to replace professional guidance. It is written for intelligent people who find themselves in a bizarre situation they have not encountered before. It is written for the many thousands of people who have contacted me after reading *Combatting Cult Mind Control*, asking what more they could do to help affected loved ones. *Releasing the Bonds* was published in 2000, and over the past twelve years it became clear that I had overstated the likelihood that people could simply read the volume and rescue their loved one. Of course, there were many successes reported back to me, but most people came to the conclusion that it is nearly impossible to have the objectivity, nor develop the experience on their own. Not to mention they did not have the extensive experience and network I have developed over 36 years of full-time effort.

My approach is based on the belief that growth is an essential part of the human experience. I have interacted with people with a wide array of belief systems and concluded that there are basic universal needs that transcend the physical. People want a positive sense of identity and a positive connection with others. They want to receive and give love rather than hate and fear. They prefer to live with trust rather than mistrust. They prefer truth to lies. They would rather be free than enslaved.

I have a high regard for religious freedom. Everyone has the right to believe, and the right to not believe, whatever they choose. As a member of the Jewish faith, I believe in a God who values the freedom to control our own lives. As a matter of principle, I am opposed to censorship or banning any group. I also believe that no legitimate group should fear an honest critique of its practices. In general, I believe the best way to prevent abuse is to educate and warn people about possible dangers.

The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution grants freedom of religion as it pertains to belief. However, the Constitution does not grant the right to engage in behavior that violates other people's rights or the laws of the land, even if there is a claim of religious motivation.

I fight to protect the right to believe whatever one wants to believe. That is why my work has had the broad support of religious leaders from various denominations and spiritual paths, including Baptists, Buddhists, The Church of Christ, Episcopalians, Hindus, Jews, Lutherans, Methodists, Pagans and Neo-Pagans, Roman Catholics, The United Church of Christ, Unitarians, and many others.

The public's need to recognize destructive influence has never been greater. Mass suicides and terrorism have brought the dangers to the forefront of the world's consciousness. Yet cult activity has increased exponentially since November 1978 when cult leader Jim Jones decided that his more than 900 followers should die along with Congressman Leo Ryan in Guyana.

Cults are on the rise for many reasons. Among the most fundamental is the breakdown of families and communities, and the growing sense that our society is in disarray. Economic factors play a role. A large and growing segment of the world's population is poor, while a relatively small elite controls an ever-increasing share of the world's resources. More people have been uprooted, even in the United States. Whereas once a person could expect to spend their entire life within a five-mile radius of their birthplace, today it's not unusual for people to relocate halfway around the globe. As people become disenchanted and separated from the culture that nurtured them, they seek answers in fringe groups of all types, from fanatical religious sects to militia groups.

Computers have taken this phenomenon to the next level. Adolescents, children, or even adults may become addicted to video games and deprive themselves of the social contact that helps humans become mature adults. I recently counseled a young man who was recruited–online–into a pseudo-Buddhist cult. Fortunately, we were able to help this gifted young man return to himself, his family and his education. What is truly amazing is that young people are essentially ignorant about major cult stories. They have never heard of Charles Manson, Jonestown, David Koresh, or Heaven's Gate.

Apocalyptic visions, even those shared by large groups, are not new. What is new is the means by which they can be promulgated. We have television, social networks and the Internet to spread alarmist ideas. More ominous, we have technologies that give groups and individuals the power to create apocalyptic disasters. On the other hand, many of those same technologies can be used to disseminate valuable information and protect people's rights.

If you Google the word *cult*, you may find yourself in an Alice-in-Wonderland world where nothing is as it seems to be. Here's one example: for many years, the non-profit Cult Awareness Network (CAN) was a grass-roots organization providing information and support to people with loved ones in cults. In 1996, the CAN name, logo, and phone number were purchased by a member of the Church of Scientology in federal bankruptcy court. CAN's confidential files were turned over to Scientology. So if you

contact this so–called “anti-cult” organization, you’ll reach someone from one of the largest and most organized international cults.

An opinion essay in *The New York Times* about the Iranian terrorist opposition group Mojāhedin-e Khalq, or Warriors of God, cites a RAND Corporation study claiming that up to 70 percent of the group’s members have been held against their will by cult leaders. This story, which drew international attention, was immediately countered by an online cult group campaign against the author, Elizabeth Rubin. The group is very savvy media and public relations-wise.

Some cult leaders have co-opted formerly anti-cult websites for their own purposes. Others simply use slander. You may read, for instance, that I, Steve Hassan practice deprogramming (false), and that I charge a king’s ransom for my services (not true). In another search, you might find yourself unwittingly recruited for sex or hypnosis, or both. The Internet is a major source of recruiting for religious and extremist groups. Powerful tools cut both ways.

That’s not to say that cults exist only in institutional settings. Cult-like traits can be seen at all levels of society–from personal relationships to government. One-over-one relationships frequently demonstrate cult-like traits: the controlling boyfriend or girlfriend, who watches the partner’s every move, won’t allow them to meet with former friends, and exhibits what looks like a mysterious power over their actions and speech. As we explain in the following pages, *social influence* exists on a continuum from benign to extremely dangerous. Knowledge of the tactics and characteristics of destructive influence is the best weapon.

I believe that the coming decade will be an especially fertile time period when profound changes, both positive and negative, will take place. Throughout the world, millions of people are searching to find purpose and meaning in their lives. A number of spiritual and political movements throughout the world offer people new hope for the future. Along with the challenges come new opportunities.

Living in the global community is an increasingly interdependent affair. We must cope with incredible stress in a world that has never before been so interconnected or fragmented. To safeguard our personal and collective freedom, it is imperative that people learn more about how the mind can be positively and negatively influenced. People must learn to know themselves and take responsibility for their own beliefs, values, and behavior. They must also develop and use social support networks to connect them to the resources of the greater community, and to help them to enjoy the fulfillment that comes with healthy, interdependent, mature

relationships.

In this book, I establish criteria to distinguish between healthy and unhealthy groups and relationships. By identifying common cult scenarios, you can see how families can work together to free their loved ones.

People ask about my motivation for working in this difficult field. I answer that there are several reasons. First, I have been the victim of a cult and I know that people, once they understand the cult mentality, do not choose to be prisoners. I also believe in the freedom and independence of the individual person and that each person has the right to live according to his or her own beliefs and not be a slave to someone else's notions. My work is stressful, but it can be intensely gratifying. It gives me great satisfaction whenever I am able to help remedy a tragedy. I always have in the back of my mind the old Talmudic saying, "Whoever destroys a soul, it is considered as if he destroyed an entire world. And whoever saves a life, it is considered as if he saved an entire world."[3]

Real love is stronger than conditional love. The love of family and friends is much more reliable than any relationship based on mind control. Relationships in cults tend to be conditional, based on obedience and subservience. However, once the member passes the honeymoon phase and their servitude becomes evident even to themselves, friends and family have the potential for an ever-increasing positive influence. Time is on their side because destructive influence is never 100 percent. The human spirit needs to be free, and ultimately, cults do not deliver what they promise.

Chapter 1

Cult Common Denominators

On March 26, 1997, the bodies of 39 men and women, dressed alike and draped in purple shrouds, were found throughout a million-dollar mansion in San Diego, California. In the weeks that followed, disturbing details emerged–how several members had castrated themselves as part of the purification process; how the cult's leader, 66-year-old Marshall Applewhite, told his followers that the willful exit of the body would mark their graduation to a higher spiritual plane; how a UFO trailing the comet Hale-Bopp would transport the group's bodies to distant space, or the Kingdom of God.[4] Heaven's Gate, one of the most visible mass suicides on U.S. soil, left many wondering, *How could this have happened? Why would anyone do such a thing?*

Some people pointed to the website where members left a collective suicide note entitled *Exit Press Release*.[5] According to the statement, members of Heaven's Gate were leaving behind their physical *containers* in order to reach the Next Evolutionary Level.

The philosophical orientations of cults may vary, but their methods are strikingly similar. By examining the conduct of cults like Heaven's Gate, we see how individuals are aggressively and deceptively recruited, indoctrinated, and made dependent through the use of psychological influence.

Professor Alan W. Scheflin, of Santa Clara University School of Law, has developed a model showing how social or psychological influence can be tracked along a continuum from benign (say, advertising) to extreme and dangerous. To be more precise and to conform with legal terms, we've substituted the words *extreme* or *destructive influence* for the older terms, *mind control* and *brainwashing*.

The Story of Gail Maeder[6]

Alice and Robert Maeder did not recognize their daughter when they saw the Heaven's Gate farewell video. Gail had cropped her hair short; the bags under her vacant eyes made her look older than her 27 years. She had

broken off contact with her family in 1994, when she was recruited into the group after splitting up with her boyfriend.

Gail's parents quickly realized that she was in trouble, and began researching cult tactics. They learned that cults often attract people during transitional stages in their lives, and use this vulnerability to manipulate them. They learned that Applewhite claimed to allow free choice, but that each member was controlled by an extensive list of rules: "Major offenses and lesser offenses," included "having likes or dislikes," "breaking any instruction or procedure knowingly," and "trusting my own judgment or using my own mind."[7] Ultimately, Gail trusted Applewhite's judgment–with devastating consequences.

When I met Alice and Robert Maeder, they told me that my book, *Combatting Cult Mind Control,* had been a lifesaver in helping them understand what happened to Gail. I winced, wishing it could have saved their daughter's life. It is my sincerest hope that this book will be a true lifesaver for other cult members.

As a spiritual searcher, Gail fit the profile of a typical recruit. Others are less obvious targets. Many Heaven's Gate members held steady jobs before deciding to follow Applewhite. Among the 39 dead were a bus driver, computer trainer, environmentalist, car salesman, nurse, paralegal, medical assistant, homemaker, and local TV personality. This diversity shows that situational and psychological variables may make a person more vulnerable, but that anyone who is unaware of the tactics of extreme influence may be recruited.

WHAT IS A DESTRUCTIVE CULT?

The diversity of cult beliefs and practices can make it hard for family members and friends to decide whether their loved one is in trouble. There are groups whose followers cut their hair short and wear identical clothing like the members of Heaven's Gate, but this is by no means the rule. Other cults require members to wear conventional clothing and blend in with the surroundings.

Behavioral patterns are more similar than appearances. By identifying certain patterns, you will be more able to determine if someone is involved with a cult. A group should not be considered a cult merely because of its unorthodox beliefs or practices. Destructive cults are distinguished by their use of deception and extreme influence.

Authoritarian Leadership

In essence, a destructive cult is an authoritarian group headed by a person or group of people with near-complete control. Charismatic cult leaders often claim divine or otherworldly powers. Many legitimate religions have had powerful figures who inspire enormous dedication. Being a powerful leader is not inherently wrong, though it carries the potential for abuse. A group becomes destructive when its leader actively uses such power to deceive members and to rob them of their individuality.

One self-proclaimed guru, Kip McKean, operates the International Christian Churches Organization and the Sold-Out Discipling Movement. In McKean's churches, there is a discipler who dictates the member's every move. In his role as Prophet, McKean is the chief shepherd of the flock.

Deception

When I was first approached by Moonie recruiters, they said they were with the One World Crusade, which was a front group for the Unification Church. They claimed to be a community of young people struggling to overcome cultural barriers. This type of recruiting is insidious because members often speak and act with the greatest sincerity, having been subjected to the same techniques they use to recruit others.

Destructive Mind Control

Cult influence is designed to disrupt a person's authentic identity and replace it with a new identity. By immersing people in a tightly controlled, high-pressure social environment, destructive cults gain control of members' behavior, thoughts, and emotions. They limit their access to outside information. They literally take control of their minds.

THE FOUR MAIN TYPES OF CULTS

The four main types of cults, which all may use similar techniques, are religious; political; therapy or large group-awareness training; and commercial. Understanding how they operate will help provide a frame of reference for future discussions.

Religious or Spiritual

These groups focus on religious dogma or spiritual practices. In many Bible-

oriented groups (Jewish, Christian, Muslim), leaders claim to be a Messiah, Prophet, or Apostle. In some, an elite group claims to know the real meaning of Scripture. In groups based on an eastern religion (Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, Jain, Sufi), leaders claim to be enlightened avatars, gurus, rinpoches, Perfect Masters, or reincarnations of enlightened masters. In the early 1980s, a man named Frederick Lenz started a Buddhist computer cult with a credo of money, status, fame, and greed–all antithetical to Buddhist beliefs.[8] He called himself Atmananda, and later, Zen Master Rama, and finally, just Rama, and proclaimed he had been a master in previous lifetimes. In Pagan and neo-Pagan cults, leaders claim to be masters of the occult (witches and warlocks). Other cults use a hodgepodge of religious teachings.

Roy Masters' Foundation for Human Understanding was one man's invention. A former stage hypnotist and diamond cutter, Roy Masters started a national radio show called *How Your Mind Can Keep You Well* and sold audiotapes which claimed to teach a new form of meditation. When I listened to these tapes, it became clear that Masters was using powerful hypnotic techniques. Later, he began to claim he was a sinless messiah, and staged exorcisms which allegedly forced demons to flee the bodies of hypnotized people.

Although most cult leaders claim to be of the spiritual realm, they show their true colors in their luxurious lifestyles, expensive real estate and extensive business enterprises.

Political Groups

Political cults are often dictatorships: brutal, repressive regimes that imprison or kill critics and dissidents. They control the press and prevent free assembly and elections that might check their power. The former Soviet Union may be understood as a political cult.

Other political cults include terrorist groups that kill innocent citizens. Suicide bombers are often members of extremist political groups. When you hear about a suicide bombing, you may wonder how someone could sacrifice his life to advance a political mission. Such fanatical acts are frequently the result of destructive influence.

There are political cults in the United States as well as overseas. Kerry Noble, for instance, was jailed for carrying a bomb into a Kansas church. His plan would have killed 60 innocent people for the purported sin of allowing gays in church. When he looked at the faces around him, however, Noble realized that his prospective victims were blameless. He wrote a

book, *Tabernacle of Hate*, about his experience as a leader of the Covenant, the Sword and the Arm of the Lord (CSA).

Therapy / Large Group Awareness Training (LGAT)

Therapists become cult leaders when they create dependency rather than empowering patients to become functional and independent. Unethical therapists may take advantage of clients–isolating them from friends and family, stealing money or sexually abusing them. Therapy cults can include a single therapist and his clients, or a group of therapists who run workshops and sessions, and purchase property where members may live together.

Even well–meaning therapists may influence patients in an unethical manner. For example, some therapists believe that most, if not all, adult problems are caused by childhood sexual abuse. Patients are encouraged, even persuaded, to generate memories of childhood sexual abuse that never actually occurred.

While the statistics on child abuse are shockingly high, and while it is clear that childhood sexual abuse can have a devastating impact later in life, there is no evidence to suggest that all, or even the large majority, of adult problems are caused by childhood sexual abuse. On the other hand, scientific evidence does show that memories of childhood abuse can be repressed in some people. Learning the truth requires delicacy and skill–which cannot exist when the therapist believes that *everyone* is abused, and that the purpose of therapy is to reveal this presumed experience.[9]

Leaders of large group awareness programs conduct workshops and seminars and charge hundreds or thousands of dollars to provide psychological insight and enlightenment–usually in a hotel meeting room. These groups use basic influence techniques to create a peak experience for participants–not surprising since many business cult leaders were once members of other cults.

Commercial Groups

These cults play upon our desire for wealth and power. Many are pyramid-shaped marketing organizations whose members deceptively recruit people who, in turn, recruit others who then provide income for the recruiting member.

Major legitimate businesses unwittingly hire pseudo-consultants to train their employees. The result can be cult infiltration. Believers within the

company pressure other employees to attend the programs. Those who refuse are fired or demoted. Even established computer companies have been taken over by this type of organization.

Although most cults fall into one of the above categories, there are countless variations–from computer to science fiction to New Age cults.

WHO IS IMPACTED BY CULTS?

People assume most calls for help are from parents, but the majority of cult members are people in their 30s to late 50s. There are children trying to save parents, wives worried about husbands, brothers concerned about sisters, boyfriends and girlfriends. I have worked with a boss trying to rescue an employee, a coach concerned about a member of his team, and a clergyman worried about someone in his congregation.

I wish I could tell you that everyone follows through after these initial calls for help. Some people may discover that their loved one is in a cult but feel reluctant, powerless, or afraid to help. Many issues block people from actively helping someone leave a destructive cult, as we will see in Chapter 5.

It's helpful to recognize that not all efforts are successful immediately. Some problems pre-date the cult involvement, and take time to untangle. But with the steady application of treatment, love and respect, cult members can be extricated and achieve independence.

COMMON CULT SCENARIOS

To give you an idea of the variety of situations where I've seen concerns about undue influence, I've compiled a sampling of some of the desperate stories I've heard. I highlighted certain passages to emphasize the most important concepts. We will return to these themes at the end of the chapter. Names and identifying features have been changed to protect these people's privacy.

Case One: Son in Bible cult

Mother: *Our 18-year-old son Jeffrey is a college freshman. A few months ago, he told us he was going to Bible studies. He rails on and on about how* ***all the other churches are dead and unspiritual****. He wants to quit school and work full-time bringing people into his group.*

SH: *To make an assessment, we'll need to know the name of the group and the leader.*

Father*: I did ask him who was the leader and he said Jesus Christ.*

SH: *That's a common answer. Ask your son, who founded it as a legal entity? Who is the local leader? Who is the worldwide leader?*

Father: *He has turned into a fanatic!*

[Note: More information on religious cults can be found in Ch. 6 and Ch. 11.]

Case Two: Brother in one-over-one destructive relationship

Alice: *Steve, I am frustrated with my brother, Peter.* ***He has turned his back on all his friends****. He's about to lose his job and he refuses to talk to our parents. He said he's tired of the family always complaining about his relationship with Patty.*

SH: *Tell me more about Patty.*

Alice: *Patty is a divorcée 10 years older than Peter. She runs his life. He has tried to get away from her, but she threatens to kill herself. I think it's* ***psychological blackmail****. I heard an interview on the radio where you were talking about* ***one-over-one relationships that followed the same destructive patterns as cults****.*

SH: *One-over-one relationships that are based on* ***manipulation, deception, dependency and isolation*** *can be very destructive.*

[Note: See Ch. 7.]

Case Three: Father controlled by *mystic*

Eric: *Our mother died two years ago and it has affected our father tremendously. He's a devout Catholic who has fallen under the spell of a 45-year-old mystic named Mandy.*

SH: *Have you been able to find out any information about this woman?*

Eric: *She was once arrested for prostitution. People say she's a pathological liar. Mandy tells Dad that* ***if he donates more money*** *to her so-called charity, God will be appeased.*

SH: *Has he given her gifts or money?*

Carol: ***He gives her large sums of money***.

[Note: For more information on how cults take financial advantage of their members, see Ch. 4.]

Case Four: Fiancée in secret cult

Rebecca: *My ex-fiancée George and I had been together for five years until we broke off. George is always busy on Tuesday and Thursday nights. He also goes away one weekend a month. He won't tell me where he's going. I gave him an ultimatum: "Tell me where you are going and what you are doing, or else!"*

SH: *Tuesday and Thursday night? I think I counseled someone from that group last year. Would you want to help him even if he doesn't return to you?*

Rebecca: *Yes.* ***I love him****. It would feel good if at least I tried to wake him up.*

[Note: More information about this secretive cult case can be found in Ch. 5.]

Case Five: Daughter rejects family

Father: *This whole mess started a month ago when our daughter Debbie was approached on the street and asked to do a personality test.*

Mother: *Then they invited her inside to watch a movie that starred John Travolta. When she told us what happened, I said, "Don't you know this group is a cult?" She just stared back at me and said, "You're wrong! If John's in it, this group can't be bad!"*

SH: *Actors and actresses are human beings.* ***Everyone is vulnerable to cult influence.***

Father: *I told Debbie the founder of this group was an aging science fiction writer with no religious or psychological credentials.*

Mother: *But all that matters to her is that her movie star is a member. She has* ***moved into the group's headquarters****. When we call and ask to speak with her, they say she isn't around.*

Father: *She's an adult, but I can't bear watching her* ***withdraw money*** *from her trust fund to pay for these so-called courses.*

[Note: A discussion of how to reconnect family and cult member can be found in Ch. 9.]

Case Six: Former member of pseudo-therapy cult

Susan: *I spent 15 years under the control of an unlicensed psychologist. He* ***controlled my behavior, my thoughts and my emotions****. Eventually,* ***he wanted to have sex with me*** *and offered me drugs.*

SH: *Did the psychologist make people cut off family members if they refused to pay for their therapy?*

Susan: *Exactly. The Doctor* ***told us that all of our problems were caused by our parents and family members****, and if they really cared about us, they would take financial responsibility for our healing.*

SH: *I've encountered these* blame-the-family-and-make-them-pay *groups before. My advice is to spend some time focusing on yourself.* ***Learn about cults and undue influence and get the proper counseling*** *to help make you strong.*

Susan: *With all due respect, Mr. Hassan, I was abused by psychotherapy and I think it's the last thing in the world that I need.*

SH: *You were abused by an unethical therapist in a destructive cult that used therapy as its front. If you were in a religious cult, you might have the same aversion to anything religious. Ethical counseling respects a person's individuality and offers tools and perspectives that empower a person.*

[Note: More information about unethical v. therapeutic counseling can be found in Ch. 6.]

Case Seven: Born in a cult

Matthew: *Steve, I'm 33 years old. I ran away from home when I was 15. I wanted to live like my school friends. I wanted to play games. I wanted to celebrate Christmas.* ***I wanted the freedom to learn and read without threats and punishment****.*

SH: *Sounds like you were raised in the Jehovah's Witnesses.*

Matthew: *Precisely. When I was old enough, I enlisted in the Marines. My parents were horrified, because Witnesses are expressly forbidden to be in the military. The Watchtower Society labeled me an apostate.*

SH: *Are you in contact with anyone in your family?*

Matthew: *Yes. My sister, Ruth, has been meeting with me secretly. I think she's on the fence but she's afraid to do anything. I've read your book and I want your help to rescue my family.*

[Note: More information about helping people escape from specific cults can be found in Chapters 4 and 7.]

Case Eight: College student, 27, joins UFO cult and disappears

Adam: *Our 27-year-old son is involved with a UFO group. We have no idea where he is. We haven't heard from him in five years.*

SH: *Most cults don't want the member to maintain contact with family and friends, unless they can be recruited or solicited for money. In some cases,* ***the cult member refuses to respond to letters and phone calls****.*

Adam: *Can you get someone out of a cult when you have lost contact?*

SH: *Yes. But* ***each case is unique, and a customized strategy should be put into place****.* Adam: *How do we go about finding a former member?*

SH: *I have a list of resources on my website,* freedomofmind.com.

[Note: For more information on how to locate a loved one who has disappeared, see Ch. 4.]

Case Nine: Employer recruiting for cult

Diane: *My employer and mentor, Mary, told me it's vital that I spend the next two weekends at a Transformational Seminar. Two beautiful fall weekends in a stuffy hotel ballroom! Mary keeps repeating, "You're going to love it! I guarantee it will change your life for the better."*

SH: *A Transformational Seminar may have certain characteristics of a destructive business cult.*

Diane: *I don't have the extra $500 to cover the fee, but I have no choice. I can't afford to lose my job!*

SH: *I'm afraid that you are not* ***adequately prepared to resist the recruitment and indoctrination procedures****. I can share with you the tools and resources you need to educate yourself. Unfortunately, you might need to find another job.*

[Note: To learn more about how to help someone involved in a

business cult, see Ch. 11.]

Case Ten: Wife joins cult

Dan: *I'm preparing for a bitter custody battle. I don't want my children to be infected by the bizarre practices of this cult my wife joined.*

SH: *How long have you been married?*

Dan: *Nineteen years.*

SH: *How many children do you have?*

Dan: *Three. Two girls, 12 and 14, and a 17-year-old son.*

SH: *What does your wife's family think of the involvement?*

Dan: *At first when she got involved with the guru, they were horrified. Then my wife started telling them lies. She told them I was abusive and controlling.*

SH: *Were you?*

Dan: *I have a strong personality, but I was never abusive.*

SH: *Long–term relationships are pretty complicated anyway. When you factor in a guru and extreme influence, then things get immeasurably more complicated.*

[Note: Family dynamics and counseling are covered in Ch. 3.]

These cases are just a small sampling of the people I have assisted over the years. At first, many of these people were not sure whether their loved one was actually in a destructive-influence situation. If you read carefully, however, you can see underlying themes that tie these stories together.

COMMON CHARACTERISTICS

Exclusivity/isolation

- *manipulation, deception, dependency and isolation*
- *all other churches are dead and unspiritual*
- *demanding a one-over-one discipling relationship*

· *recruit turns his back on all his friends, spending more time with the guru/group*

· *meetings are secret*

· *cult member moves into the group's headquarters*

· *the cult member refuses to respond to letters and phone calls*

· *the family doesn't know where their loved one is*

Abuse of power

· *psychological blackmail*

· *threatening prophecies*

· *cult leader or leadership asks for money and property*

· *guru demands to have sex with a member*

Creation of the pseudo (cult) identity

· *I don't recognize my own bright, warm, loving son*

· *guru tries to control member's behavior, thoughts and emotions*

· *cult member is like an actor who comes to believe the 'role' is reality*

If some of these characteristics sound familiar, there is a good chance that the group in question is a destructive cult. The following chapters will give you specific criteria for evaluating the destructive potential of a group.

Many people feel overwhelmed and hopeless when they first realize that their loved one is in a cult. But I have found that. once friends and family understand the Strategic Interactive Approach, this sense of helplessness can be replaced by confidence and hope for the cult member's future.

IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF THE STRATEGIC INTERACTIVE APPROACH

Real love is stronger than conditional love

The fact that you are willing to help and are seeking professional advice means there is reason to hope

The member will realize that your love is unconditional, while the cult's 'love' depends on their meeting expectations and goals

Preparatory work: learning to think and act strategically

The sooner you learn about destructive influence, cults, goal-oriented communication and how to interact effectively, the faster you will be able to make a positive difference in your loved one's life

Learn about cults and influence and seek appropriate counseling

Goal-oriented communication

Build greater rapport and trust step by step –that's the Strategic Interactive Approach

Resourcefulness

Flexibility and teamwork

Get the member's family involved

Learn how many ways there are to reconnect seemingly lost relationships

Each case is unique and requires a customized strategy

I have an evaluation form that can be used by friends and family to assess their resources and plan a course of action. Taking the time to think about your situation and writing down your thoughts and feelings can be therapeutic and will help you relate your experiences to the information in this book. The form is available on the Internet at:
http://freedomofmind.com/Services/help1.php

SUMMARY:

Although cults can spring from many sources—religious, political, therapeutic, commercial and others—they have several fundamental qualities that help us to identify them as potentially dangerous.

- Authoritarian leadership
- Deceptive practices
- Tightly controlled emotional and intellectual environment

Cults can affect all types of people. Many calls for help come from children wanting to help parents or siblings concerned about family members. The range of situations is broad and the themes are numerous.

If you want to help a cult member you must be very careful to base any actions you make on respect for their rights and love for the person they are. The most effective approach is to remain flexible and plan carefully. A good example is the Strategic Interactive Approach.

Chapter 2

What Is Destructive Social Influence?

While I was in the Moon cult, my friends and family told me I had been "brainwashed," that I was under "mind control." I associated mind control with being handcuffed, tortured, and interrogated under bright lights, and I knew that hadn't happened to me. So when people called me a brainwashed robot, I thought they were persecuting me for my beliefs. Their negative comments reinforced my commitment to the group.

In this edition, I've replaced the terms *mind control* and *brainwash* with the more current phrases *social influence* or *destructive influence*. This is in keeping with new research that shows that humans are extraordinarily sensitive to social cues–which has been a factor in our species' success, but which can also be used against us as individuals.

Robert Jay Lifton's 1961 book *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism*[10] provided my first frame of reference for understanding social influence during my intervention.

UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL INFLUENCE

After World War II, many wondered how ordinary German citizens could have participated in genocide. The dominant theory at the time was best explained by "The Authoritarian Personality" model. However, social psychologists began to research the various ways that individual thoughts, feelings, and behaviors can be influenced by the actual, imagined, or implied presence of others. Solomon Asch did his famous group conformity study during which subjects were shown a series of lines of varying sizes and participants knowingly chose the wrong size line, and approximately two thirds went along with the obviously wrong answer due to social pressure. Stanley Milgram did his famous "shock box" experiment where two thirds of subjects flipped a series of levers which seemed to be passing increasing high levels of electricity to a man with a phony heart condition. Most people succumbed to the pressure of following what they thought was a legitimate authority figure and "killed" the man, just because they were ordered to obey.

In 1971, Dr. Philip Zimbardo conducted a now-famous experiment on the social psychology of imprisonment. Twenty-one emotionally stable,

mature, law-abiding student volunteers were divided into two groups–guards and prisoners. The experiment was supposed to last two weeks, but had to be stopped after only six days. The guards adopted their roles with alarming eagerness. One of the guards reported:

"I was surprised at myself...I made them call each other names and clean out the toilets with their bare hands. I practically considered the prisoners cattle, and I kept thinking I have to watch out for them in case they try something."[11]

* * *

LIFTON'S EIGHT POINTS

1. Milieu control: Control of environment and communication within that environment. This includes not only what people communicate with each other, but how the group gets inside a person's head and controls his internal dialogue.
2. Mystical manipulation: The contrived engineering of experiences to stage seemingly spontaneous and supernatural events. Everyone is manipulated for a higher purpose.
3. Demand for purity: Establishing impossible standards for performance, thereby creating an environment of guilt and shame. No matter how hard a person tries, he always falls short, feels bad, and works even harder.
4. The cult of confession: The destruction of personal boundaries, and the expectation that every thought, feeling, or action–past or present–that does not conform to the group's rules be shared or confessed. This information is not forgotten or forgiven but, rather, used to control.
5. Sacred science: The belief that the group's dogma is absolutely scientifically and morally true, with no room for questions or alternative viewpoints.
6. Loading the language: The use of vocabulary to constrict members' thinking into absolute, black-and-white, thought-terminating clichés understood only by insiders.
7. Doctrine over person: The imposition of group beliefs over individual experience, conscience, and integrity.
8. Dispensing of existence: The belief that people in the group have the right to exist and all ex-members and critics or dissidents do not.

* * *

Within a few days, the prisoners organized a rebellion. They tore off their ID numbers and barricaded themselves inside their cells. The guards sprayed them with a fire extinguisher, burst into their cells, stripped them, took away their beds, and thoroughly intimidated them.

Zimbardo and his colleagues had not expected such a rapid transformation:

"What was most surprising about the outcome of this simulated prison experience was the ease with which sadistic behavior could be elicited from quite normal young men, and the contagious spread of emotional pathology among those carefully selected precisely for their emotional stability."[12]

This experiment, which lasted less than a week, demonstrates in a frightening way how much a person's identity depends on what role he is playing. Zimbardo's experiment echoes the dilemma articulated in 1957 by Vance Packard in *The Hidden Persuaders,*[13] an early treatise on the power of advertising: "When you are manipulating people, where do you stop? Who is to fix the point at which manipulative attempts become socially undesirable?"

Zimbardo has since become one of the leaders in the study of mind control. He taught me the *fundamental attribution error*, which explains how people consistently attribute other people's behaviors to their own dispositions rather than to environmental factors.[14] Especially in the United States where individuality is prized, people tend to assume that they acted because it was their own idea rather than because they have been influenced by outside forces. But social psychology has demonstrated that everybody is deeply influenced by their environment. It is human nature to adopt what is perceived to be appropriate behavior.

Social psychologist Robert Cialdini, in his groundbreaking book, *Influence*[15], extracted six universal principles of influence—those that are so powerful that they generate desirable change in the widest range of circumstances. The principles are:

- **Reciprocation.** People are more willing to comply with requests (for favors, services, information, concessions, etc.) from those who have provided such things first. For example, according to the American Disabled Veterans organization, mailing out a simple

appeal for donations produces an 18% success rate; but, enclosing a small gift–personalized address labels–boosts the success rate to 35%.

- **Commitment/Consistency.** People are more willing to be moved in a particular direction if they see it as consistent with an existing or recent commitment. Consider how small that commitment can be and still motivate change forcefully: Gorden Sinclair, a Chicago restaurant owner, was beset by the problem of no-shows-people who made table reservations but failed to appear and failed to call to cancel. He reduced the problem by first getting a small commitment. He instructed his receptionists to stop saying, “Please call if you change your plans” and to start saying, “Will you call us if you change your plans?” The no-show rate dropped from 30% to 10% immediately.
- **Authority.** People are more willing to follow the directions or recommendations of a communicator to whom they attribute relevant authority or expertise. One study showed that 3 times as many pedestrians were willing to follow a man into traffic against the red light when he was merely dressed as an authority in a business suit and tie.
- **Social Validation.** People are more willing to take a recommended action if they see evidence that many others, especially similar others, are taking it. One researcher went door to door collecting for charity and carrying a list of others in the area who had already contributed. The longer the list, the more contributions it produced.
- **Scarcity.** People find objects and opportunities more attractive to the degree that they are scarce, rare, or dwindling in availability. Even information that is scarce is more effective. A beef importer in the US informed his customers (honestly) that, because of weather conditions in Australia, there was likely to be a shortage of Australian beef. His orders more than doubled. However, when he added (also honestly) that this information came from his company's exclusive contacts in the Australian National Weather Service, orders increased by 600%!
- **Liking/Friendship.** People prefer to say yes to those they know and like. For example, research done on Tupperware Home Demonstration parties shows that guests are 3 times more likely to purchase products because they like the party's hostess than because they like the products.

In his presentations, Professor Cialdini describes and emphasizes the

ethical use of these principles. Only through its non-manipulative use can the influence process be simultaneously effective, ethical, and enduring. And only in this fashion can it enhance a lasting sense of partnership between those involved in the exchange. His company, Influenceatwork.com, teaches corporations, governmental leaders and other businessman around the world.

MIND CONTROL OR SOCIAL INFLUENCE?

Social influence–or, to use the older term, mind control–refers to a set of methods and techniques, such as hypnosis or thought-stopping, that influence how a person thinks, feels, and acts. It is not inherently good or evil. These techniques can be used to empower an individual to have more choices and responsibility for his life, such as enabling him or her to quit smoking. Psychological influence becomes destructive when it is used to undermine a person's ability to think and act independently.

As employed by the most destructive cults, psychological influence seeks to disrupt an individual's identity–personal behavior, thoughts, emotions—and reconstruct it in the image of the leader. This is done by rigidly controlling the member's physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual life. Cult control is a social process that encourages obedience and conformity. It discourages autonomy and individuality. The group's dogma becomes the person's only concern. Anything or anyone that does not fit into this reshaped reality is irrelevant.

MIND CONTROL OR BRAINWASHING

The term *brainwashing* was coined in 1951 by journalist Edward Hunter from the Chinese *hsi nao* (wash brain), to describe the process by which Americans captured in the Korean War could reverse their allegiance and confess to fictional war crimes. In the 1950s, military psychologists and psychiatrists Margaret Singer, Robert Jay Lifton, Louis West and Edgar Schein began to research a phenomenon they called thought reform, in order to devise ways to protect soldiers in the future.[16]

As a senior psychologist at Walter Reed Army Hospital in the 1950s, Margaret Singer studied the effects of thought reform on Korean War prisoners. Singer, who went on to do pioneering work on cults, summarizes 50 years of her work on thought reform in her book *Cults in Our Midst*.[17] She lays out six conditions for thought reform.

The term brainwashing is often associated with overtly coercive behaviors, exemplified by the image of a prisoner at the hands of abusive jailers. With social influence, the agents of influence are viewed as friends or mentors, which causes people to lower their defenses. Social influence gives the illusion of control. The individual believes he is making his own choices, when in fact he has been influenced to disconnect his own critical and decision-making capacity.

* * *

SINGER'S CONDITIONS FOR THOUGHT REFORM

1. Gain control over a person's time, especially his thinking time and physical environment.
2. Create a sense of powerlessness, fear and dependency, while providing models that demonstrate the new, ideal behavior.
3. Manipulate rewards, punishments and experiences to suppress the recruitís former social behavior and attitudes, including the use of altered states of consciousness to manipulate experience.
4. Manipulate rewards, punishments and experiences to elicit behavior and attitudes desired by leadership.
5. Create a tightly controlled system with a closed system of logic, wherein dissenters feel their questioning indicates something inherently wrong with them.
6. Keep recruits unaware and uninformed that there is an agenda to control or change them. Thought-reform is impossible when a person is functioning at full capacity with informed consent.

* * *

COGNITIVE DISSONANCE: THE EVOLUTION OF THE BITE MODEL

In 1950, psychologist Leon Festinger summarized his cognitive dissonance theory: "If you change a person's behavior, his thoughts and feelings will change to minimize the dissonance."[18]

Dissonance is the psychological tension that arises when a person's

behavior conflicts with his beliefs. We prefer that our behavior, thoughts, and emotions be mutually consistent, and we can tolerate only a certain amount of discrepancy. Like hunger, this tension is uncomfortable, and people will take measures to reduce it.

This tendency can manifest itself in different ways. For example:

- When people behave in ways they see as either stupid or immoral, they change their attitudes so the behavior seems sensible and justified.
- People who hold opposing views are apt to interpret the same news reports or factual material about the disputed subject quite differently; each sees and remembers what supports his views, but glosses over and forgets what would create dissonance.
- When people who think of themselves as reasonably humane are in a situation where they hurt innocent people, they reduce the resulting dissonance by marginalizing or despising their victims.
- There is a strong inclination to reduce cognitive dissonance by rationalization.

In 1956, Festinger wrote *When Prophecy Fails,* a book about a Wisconsin flying saucer cult. The leader, Marian Keech, said she was receiving messages sent by a superior Guardian from the planet Clarion. She predicted that there would be a great flood and all except a chosen few would perish. Her followers sold their homes, gave away their money, and waited for the spaceships.

When the fateful morning came–with no saucers and no flood–one might think the followers would become disillusioned. But Marian Keech proclaimed that the Guardian had witnessed their faithful vigil and decided to spare the Earth. Most members wound up feeling *more* committed to her, in spite of the public humiliation. According to Festinger, the reason for this renewed commitment is that the cult members' feelings and thoughts had to be changed to reduce the dissonance created by events.

Cognitive dissonance theory simplified a highly complex phenomenon. Neuroscientists have since developed more sophisticated theories. But the theory gave me a more structured way of thinking about destructive influence.

The Evolution of my BITE Model

There are three components to Festinger's theory: control of behavior,

control of thoughts, and control of emotions. By manipulating these three elements, cults gain control over a person's identity. Through my experience with former cult members, I have identified a fourth component that is equally important: control of information. When you control the information received by someone, you limit his capacity for independent thought.

These four factors, which can be remembered as BITE[19] (Behavior, Information, Thoughts, and Emotions), serve as the foundation for understanding destructive influence. It is important to understand that the *overall* effect of these four components promotes dependency and obedience to some leader or cause. It is not necessary for every single item on the list to be present. Cult members can live in their own apartments, have 9-to-5 jobs, be married with children, and still be unable to think for themselves and act independently.

* * *

THE BITE MODEL

I. Behavior Control

1. Regulate individual's physical reality
    1. Dictate where, how, and with whom the member lives and associates/isolation
    2. Sexual repression, anti-gay, celibacy, anti-masturbation
    3. Control types of clothing that are permissible, colors, hairstyles worn by the person
    4. Regulate food and drink allowed or rejected – fasting
    5. Take away passports; abduction; physical imprisonment, torture
    6. Sleep manipulation – deprivation
    7. Tracking with GPS, remote cameras
    8. Financial exploitation, manipulation or dependence
    9. Restrict leisure, entertainment, vacation time
2. Major time spent with group indoctrination and group rituals or self indoctrination through Internet
3. Require permission for major decisions
4. Insist that thoughts, feelings, and activities (of self and others) be reported to superiors
5. Rewards and punishments (thus modify behaviors, both positive and

negative)
6. Discourage individualism, encourage group-think
7. Rape/sexual exploitation, castration, tattooing
8. Impose rigid rules and regulations
9. Threats of harm to friends/family
10. No medical treatment
11. Instill obedience and dependency

II. Information Control

1. Deception:
    1. Deliberately withhold information
    2. Distort information to make it more acceptable
    3. Systematically lie to the cult member
2. Minimize or discourage access to non-cult sources of information, including:
    1. Internet, TV, radio, books, articles, newspapers, magazines, other media
    2. Critical information
    3. Former members
    4. Keep members busy so they don't have time to think and investigate
    5. Control use of cell phone through texting, calls, internet tracking
3. Compartmentalize information into Outsider vs. Insider doctrines
    1. Ensure that information is not freely accessible
    2. Control information at different levels and missions within pyramid
    3. Allow only leadership to decide who needs to know what and when
4. Encourage spying on other members
    1. Impose a buddy system to monitor and control member
    2. Report deviant thoughts, feelings, sexual identity, and actions to leadership
    3. Ensure that individual behavior is monitored by group
5. Extensive use of cult-generated information and propaganda, including:
    1. Newsletters, magazines, journals, audiotapes, videotapes, and other media
    2. Misquotations, statements taken out of context from non-cult sources
6. Unethical use of confession
    1. Information about sins used to dissolve identity boundaries

    2. Past sins used to manipulate and control; no forgiveness or absolution
    3. Confabulating events
7. Use of videos, You-Tube and movies

III. Thought Control

1. Member required to internalize the group's doctrine as truth
    1. Adopting the group's 'map of reality' as reality
    2. Instill black and white thinking
    3. Decide between good vs. evil
    4. Organize people into us vs. them (insiders vs. outsiders)
2. Use of loaded language – for example, thought-terminating clichés. (Words are tools for thinking. Special words – constricting rather than expanding knowledge, stopping thought process – function to reduce complexities into platitudinous buzz words)
3. Only so-called good and proper thoughts are encouraged
4. Hypnotic techniques are used to alter mental state, age regress to undermine critical thinking and reality testing (past lives, confabulating events)
5. Memories are manipulated and false memories are created
6. Thought-stopping techniques, which shut down reality testing by stopping negative and allow only so-called good thoughts, are used:
    1. Denial, rationalization, justification, wishful thinking
    2. Chanting
    3. Meditating
    4. Praying
    5. Speaking in tongues
    6. Singing or humming
7. Rejection of rational analysis, critical thinking, constructive criticism
8. No critical questions about leader, doctrine, or policy allowed
9. Alternative belief systems viewed as illegitimate, evil, or not useful
10. Sexual repression, anti-gay, celibacy, anti-masturbation

IV. Emotional Control

1. Manipulate and narrow the range of feelings – some emotions are deemed evil, wrong, selfish – sexual repression
2. Emotion-stopping (like thought stopping, but blocking feelings like homesickness, anger, doubts)
3. Make the person feel that problems are their own fault – never the leader's or the group's fault

4. Excessive use of guilt
    1. Identity guilt
    2. You are not living up to your potential
    3. Your family is deficient
    4. Your past is suspect
    5. Your affiliations are unwise
    6. Your thoughts, feelings, actions are irrelevant/selfish
    7. Social guilt
    8. Historical guilt
5. Excessive use of fear
    1. Fear of thinking independently
    2. Fear of the outside world
    3. Fear of enemies
    4. Fear of losing one's salvation
    5. Fear of leaving the group or being shunned by the group
    6. Fear of disapproval
6. Extremes of emotional highs and lows – love bombing and praise, then you are horrible, a sinner
7. Ritualistic and public confession of sins
8. Phobia indoctrination: inculcating irrational fears about leaving the group or questioning the leader's authority
    1. No happiness or fulfillment possible outside of the group
    2. Terrible consequences if you leave: hell, demon possession, incurable diseases, accidents, suicide, insanity, 10,000 reincarnations, etc.
    3. Shunning of those who leave; fear of being rejected by friends, peers, and family
    4. Never a legitimate reason to leave; those who leave are weak, undisciplined, unspiritual, worldly, brainwashed by family or counselor, or seduced by money, sex, or rock and roll
    5. Threat to harm family/friends

* * *

B is for BEHAVIOR CONTROL

Behavior control is the regulation of a person's physical environment (habitat, companions, food, sleep) and conduct (tasks, rituals, other activities). Behavior control may include sleep deprivation, restricted diet, invasion of privacy, separation from friends and newcomers, and isolation.

Cults often impose an oppressive time schedule on their members' lives. When members are not engaged in rituals or indoctrination, they are assigned specific tasks to restrict their free time and behavior. In a destructive cult, there is always work to be done, no time to think.

Some extreme cults, like Heaven's Gate, never allow members to be alone. Former members say that the Bible-based cult, Twelve Tribes, employs the same tactics "in the name of God".[20] Members of some cults are assigned a buddy, discipling partner, or central figure who monitors their behavior. A cult's members are bound by rituals, which may include mannerisms such as speech, posture, or facial expression. (In the Moonies, where Koreans are considered the master race, we sang Korean folk songs, ate *kimchi* [Korean pickled cabbage], and bowed or removed our shoes before entering a group center.)

The pyramid-shaped structure of cults allows leaders to enforce a strict system of rewards and punishments. Obedience and good performance are rewarded with public praise, gifts, or promotions, while disobedience and poor performance are punished with criticism, demotions, or the assignment of menial tasks like cleaning toilets.

In a legitimate church, if your mother is sick or injured, you go to the minister or pastor and say, "My mother is ill. I'm going to visit her in the hospital. Please say a prayer for her." In a Bible cult, you are expected to humbly approach the leader or sub-leader and ask, "May I have permission to visit my mother?" (In the Moonies, when leaders didn't want members to get emotionally involved with their families, we were told to "leave the dead to bury the dead." All outsiders were considered spiritually dead.)

In the Jehovah's Witnesses, I know a woman who was excommunicated because she sent a birthday card to a nonmember. When a cult tells members they can't associate with former members—even with their best friends or families—it is using both behavior control and information control.

I is for INFORMATION CONTROL

Information control begins during recruitment, when cults withhold or distort information. Very often, a person does not suspect he is being recruited. Perhaps a friend or relative wants to share some incredible insights or experiences. If the recruiter is a stranger, more often than not, the person believes he has made a new friend. (In reality, friendships don't form overnight. They take time to develop, with each person gradually sharing

information in a balanced way). Cult recruiters are skilled at drawing out information without revealing much about themselves or the group.

By compartmentalizing information, cults keep members from seeing the big picture. People are given only the information they are *ready for*, or as much as they *need to know*. Recruits who ask questions are told they are not mature enough yet to know the whole truth. Insider doctrines are reserved for people who are thoroughly indoctrinated. In this way, any assessment is delayed until the recruit's critical judgment is impaired.

Information control may involve blocking critical or negative points of view. Some cults forbid members to have access to non-cult materials such as newspapers, magazines, television, radio, and the Internet, while others have more subtle ways of controlling information. Some encourage members to use software that would automatically block access to Internet sites run by former members and critics.[21]

Members spy on one another and report improper activities or comments, such as criticism of the leader, doctrine, or organization. This information, as well as anything divulged by members during confession, may be used to manipulate them. Some cults wiretap telephones and intercept letters to increase their control.

A legitimate organization allows people the freedom to think for themselves, read whatever they like, and talk to whomever they choose, whereas a destructive-influence group attempts to do the thinking for you.

T is for THOUGHT CONTROL

A cult's doctrine is seen as absolute truth, the only answer to a member's problems. Cult doctrine teaches its members: *We are the way! We are the truth! You who are not in the group are lost.* True believers have a hard time seeing the cult doctrine as open to interpretation.

Many cults have their own loaded language, coded symbols and expressions, including buzz words, clichés, and platitudes. In the Moonies, an event that went badly was called an *indemnity*, which meant a wrong that had to be righted. If it rained while Moon was giving a lecture at Yankee Stadium, it was an *indemnity* because America didn't love the Messiah.

After I left the Moonies, I realized I had been trained to use hypnotic processes without knowing it. For example, I was taught that the eyes are the windows of the soul, and when you talk to people you should look at a point three inches behind their eyes. I later found out that this technique is a

hypnotic induction pattern called eye fixation, which can be used to produce an altered state of consciousness, or trance.

Although I am aware of a few cult leaders who studied Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), I suspect that most use informal methods—naturalistic hypnotic techniques—to induce trance states.[22] Certainly meditation can be taught in a way to shut down "reality-testing." Chanting for hours or reciting affirmations may promote spiritual growth, but they can also be used unethically to indoctrinate someone.

In a trance, the conscious, analytical mind is disengaged and the subconscious mind is engaged. Trance is not sleep; it is focused attention. It is a gift to be able to shut out noise and distraction, but it can also increase susceptibility. In this special state of relaxation, messages may take root in your subconscious.

Cult members are taught that the leader is always correct. Disillusionment is the fault of the member. Meditation or prayer, used in an automatic way, can turn off critical thinking. Through a technique called thought-stopping, these reactions are programmed to kick in mechanically whenever the member feels doubt, anxiety, or uncertainty.

Thought-stopping is a behavior modification technique that also has positive applications. People who are chronically depressed may have a running negative conversation with themselves: (*I'm stupid. Nobody cares about me.*) When used in a therapeutic way, thought-stopping substitutes positive thoughts for negative ones. (*I'm growing. I'm getting better.*) In this case, there is no hidden agenda. The patient, not the therapist, is in control.

In the Moonies, I was told that thought-stopping would keep me focused on God. I didn't know it was a mind-control technique. When someone asked, "Why does Moon have an M16 gun factory?"[23] I would automatically start chanting in my head, *Glory to heaven, peace on earth.* In Bible-based cults, reciting scripture, speaking in tongues, and humming are used to block critical thinking.

E is for EMOTIONAL CONTROL

Nobody sets out with the intention of being deceived and manipulated. Ex-members often say that during the indoctrination, they heard a voice within them saying, *Be careful! Get the heck out of here!* The cult must silence that voice.

Emotions tell us things we need to know. Cults gain control over members' emotions by keeping them off-balance. On one hand, cults make people feel special by showering them with praise (a practice called *love-bombing)*. On the other hand, cults manipulate members to create dependency. Anger, homesickness, and jealousy are labeled selfish. Members are expected to always think of the group, and never to feel for themselves.

After the love and idealism, the cult world fills with fear–fear that the planet will explode, fear of nuclear holocaust, fear that he will lose his spiritual connection will be severed, fear of possession by the devil. Fear binds members to the group; members become paranoid or phobic.

A phobia is an irrational fear. An intense phobic reaction can cause physical responses like racing heartbeat, dry mouth, sweating, and muscle tension. Chapter 10 describes how cults practice systematic phobia indoctrination, and how to unlock such phobias.

For example, the Moonies tell members that ten generations of their ancestors are stuck in the spirit world. If the member doesn't obey the leadership, these relatives will suffer for all eternity. In the Jehovah's Witnesses, there is a severe phobia about churches. I remember an incident involving a young Jehovah's Witness who refused to participate in an emergency evacuation from a public school into a church. The 10-year old boy had to be carried in, crying and screaming, because he thought that all churches are filled with devils.[24]

Some people have pre-existing phobias used against them. One woman, who as a child had been locked in a closet with a rat, was told by the cult that if she betrayed the leader, she would be trapped in a room with rats for eternity. I once met a former Hare Krishna who was told that if he ever left the group, he would suffer 10,000 reincarnations as a roach or a flea. I was raised in a Jewish family, and the Moonies told me that six million Jews had died in the Holocaust to pay for the indemnity of failing to accepting Jesus as their savior. These horrible deaths, they said, set the foundation for Moon, the Messiah.

Control of Behavior, Information, Thoughts, Emotions (BITE). On their own, each has the potential to alter a person's identity. When all of these forms of control are used, the effect is more extreme. A group that changes names, insists on a dress code, lives on an isolated compound, and cuts off all contact with outsiders is likely to be very dangerous.

Keep in mind, the BITE model exists on a continuum and the degree of

control can vary greatly within a particular group. Someone at the bottom of the pyramid–fringe members–will experience less control than someone at the top. For example, the Transcendental Meditation (TM) organization fits the BITE model although most TMsers are on the fringe—they pay their money, are initiated and receive their private mantra; they practice the 15-minute TM technique twice a day, and go no further.[25] (However, in my opinion, even these members are deceived: for instance, they are told their mantras are unique, which is not true.) Those who study advanced courses, meditate for hours each day, learn to fly, attend Maharishi International University, and come to view their master as the only enlightened being on Earth, fit into the destructive-cult model.

In a destructive cult or controlling relationship, the locus of control shifts to the person in "power." The recruit abdicates his ability to make decisions. A pseudo-identity is created which suppresses the authentic self and surrenders control.[26] Individuality is submerged, and free will subverted. People are kept in the dark, and the very processes that influence them are often made to seem spiritual or mystical. Access to any contravening information is cut off.

CREATION OF THE CULT IDENTITY

Cults manipulate the elements that form an individual's identity including beliefs, values, and relationships. From a mental-health perspective, the cult diverts elements of an individual's psyche into another personality. The cult member comes to exhibit symptoms of dissociative disorder as defined in the DSMIV, the diagnostic manual for the American Psychiatric Association.[27] His behavior may resemble that of a person with a dependent personality disorder.

One universal concern of family and friends is their loved one's radical personality change. The loved one has been taught to suppress his old self. The makeover often includes a change of name, clothes, hairstyle, speech, mannerisms, family, friends, thoughts, emotions, and a new relationship with God.

Cult involvement seems to pull much of the common ground out from under family, friends and the loved one. When you are with someone in a cult, it is difficult to talk on a rational level. After I joined the Moonies, my family and friends did not recognize me. When I *refroze* into the cult identity, they could no longer communicate with me.

A common method for shaping a cult identity is to pair a new member with an older member. The spiritual child is instructed to imitate the spiritual parent in every way. During every waking moment and, especially under trance, I was instructed to be a “small Sun Myung Moon." A Bible cult called The International Church of Christ encourages an intense imitation of one’s leader. This modeling technique keeps the spiritual mentor on his best behavior and whets the new member’s appetite to become a respected model, so he, himself, can train junior members.

After I left the Moonies, I found Edgar Schein’s book, *Coercive Persuasion*, where he described the process using Kurt Lewin’s model of [28]
thought reform:

- *Unfreezing*: breaking a person down
- *Changing*: indoctrination
- *Refreezing*: reinforcing the new identity

I have adapted and expanded Kurt Lewin’s three-stage model.

* * *

THE THREE STAGES OF GAINING CONTROL OF THE MIND

1. Unfreezing
    1. Disorientation/confusion
    2. Sensory deprivation and/or sensory overload
    3. Physiological manipulation
        1. Sleep deprivation
        2. Privacy deprivation
        3. Change of diet
    4. Hypnosis
        1. Age regression
        2. Visualizations
        3. Storytelling and metaphors
        4. Linguistic double binds, use of suggestion

5. Meditation, chanting, praying, singing
5. Getting the person to question his or her identity
6. Redefining individual's past (implant false memories, forget positive memories)

2. Changing
    1. Creation and imposition of new identity, step by step
        1. Formally within indoctrination sessions
        2. Informally by members, CDs, books, etc.
    2. Use of behavior modification
        1. Rewards and punishments
        2. Thought-stopping
        3. Control of environment
    3. Mystical manipulation
    4. Use of hypnosis and other mind-altering techniques
        1. Repetition, monotony, rhythm
        2. Excessive chanting, praying, decreeing, visualizations
    5. Use of confession and testimonials
3. Refreezing
    1. New identity reinforced, old identity surrendered
        1. Separate from the past; decrease contact or cut off friends and family
        2. Give up meaningful possessions and assets
        3. Engage in cult activities: recruit, fundraise, move in with members
    2. New name, clothing, hairstyle, language, and family
    3. Pair up with new role models, buddy system
    4. Ongoing indoctrination: workshops, retreats, seminars, individual studies, group activities

* * *

As I look back at my involvement with the Moonies, Lewin's three terms–unfreezing, changing, and refreezing–strike a chord. When I was first recruited, I experienced a personality meltdown. During indoctrination, I underwent a radical change. When my identity refroze, it was as if I had become a clone of Sun Myung Moon.

This aspect of indoctrination was demonstrated by Dr. Flavil Yeakley, a respected psychologist and member of the mainline Church of Christ, who

administered the Myers-Briggs Personality Type Inventory Test to 800 members of The Boston Church of Christ, a cult group led by Kip McKean.

The Myers-Briggs Inventory describes 16 basic personality types, which are thought to remain consistent throughout one's lifetime. The major categories are Introvert/Extrovert, Sensing/Intuitive, Feeling/Thinking, and Judging/Perceiving, as demonstrated by the questionnaire.

Extroverts are outgoing and comfortable with others. *Introverts* prefer to be alone, with books or computers. *Sensing* people are more practical or realistic, while *Intuitives* can be described as more innovative and tend to trust their hunches.

Other categories are *Thinking* (making objective, impersonal judgments) and *Feeling* (emotional, personal). *Perceiving* people tend to keep things open-ended and wait until the last minute to make a decision, while those who are deemed *Judging* like to reach closure quickly.

Yeakley had members fill out the Personality Type Inventory Test three times. They were instructed to: 1. Answer each question the way they would have before they joined the group; 2. Fill it out as present members of the group; and 3. Fill it out projecting five years into the future.

When Yeakley correlated the data, he found that members varied widely in their personality types before they joined the group. (In statistical terms, they exhibited a normal distribution of personality types.) In the second test, members were moving towards one personality type, which matched the projected personality of the cult leader. (Interestingly, the type is Extrovert, Sensing, Feeling, Judging–the type of person often thought of as a super-salesman.) The third test showed an almost universal move toward the projected leader's personality type.

As a comparison, Yeakley administered the test to members of Catholic, Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist and Presbyterian churches and mainline Churches of Christ. There was no personality change before, during, or after they joined their churches. Yeakley published the results of this study in his book, *The Discipling Dilemma.*[29] Although a healthy individual will grow and mature over time, his basic personality doesn't change. Changes in personality type may indicate unhealthy social pressure. The results of Yeakley's study shows that cults create this kind of pressure. It also verified for me the existence of a cult identity that binds the authentic self like a straitjacket.

When interacting with your loved one in a cult, it is essential that you recognize the differences between the pre-cult identity (before recruitment),

the cult identity (during membership), and the person's authentic self, which stays unchanged. Even people who are born into cults have an authentic self that was suppressed from birth. It is the strength of the authentic self that makes it possible to rescue people from cults many years, even decades after they join. When informed family and friends begin working as a team to educate their loved one about destructive influence, the cult identity and its barriers will begin to crumble.

SUMMARY:

Fundamentals of destructive and social influence outlined

Lifton's Eight Points:

1. Milieu control
2. Mystical manipulation
3. Demand for purity
4. The cult of confession
5. Sacred science
6. Loading the language
7. Doctrine over person
8. Dispensing of existence

The Group Conformity Study by Solomon Asch demonstrates the effects of social pressure.

The famous "shock box" experiment by Stanley Milgram demonstrates that most people succumb to pressure from a legitimate authority figure.

Experiments and theory of behavior from Zimbardo and Singer show how much a person's identity depends on what role he is playing

Dissonance is the psychological tension that arises when a person's behavior conflicts with his beliefs. Psychologist Leon Festinger summarized

cognitive dissonance theory: “If you change a person’s behavior, his thoughts and feelings will change to minimize the dissonance.”

Cialdini’s Universal Principles of Influence:

- Reciprocation
- Commitment/Consistency
- Authority
- Social Validation
- Scarcity
- Liking/Friendship

The BITE model is a useful tool to help evaluate ways in which a person or group controls a person’s life.

- Behavior control
- Information control
- Thought control
- Emotions control

To create a cult identity the person’s identity is unfrozen, changed and refrozen. For people born into an authoritarian family or group, the person’s “true self” is suppressed but not destroyed.

Chapter 3

The Strategic Interactive Approach

Ever since destructive cults came to the attention of the public in the late 1960s, families have looked for ways to rescue their loved ones. Early methods, such as deprogramming, were unsophisticated and sometimes illegal. Over the past 30 plus years, counseling techniques, research in social psychology and the development of the Internet have evolved to give us more effective tools to help break the chains.

Since I first published *Combatting Cult Mind Control* in 1988*,* I have assessed which approaches were effective and which were ineffective. As new patterns emerged, my counseling became more refined. This book brings together all of my knowledge into a unified, detailed, and user–friendly method—the Strategic Interactive Approach (SIA).

When a loved one enters a cult, the entire family system is impacted. Parents are often consumed with guilt, fear, anger, and frustration. Long-term successful marriages can buckle. Siblings who had very good relationships may feel annoyed when pressured by their loved one to join the cult, and angry or upset when they are labeled evil for refusing. At the very least, siblings feel frustration and anger as they see the pain the cult member is causing their family. If there were pre-existing problems, such as jealousy, mistrust, control issues, lack of communication or intimacy, a real quagmire can result.

The first step in the SIA is to promote change and encourage growth in the family as well as in the cult member. Only then is it possible to create the conditions that will motivate the cult member to step away and begin questioning cult involvement.

JIM AND RAMA

One case that illustrates the Strategic Interactive Approach involves a young man we'll call Jim, who had joined a quasi-Buddhist computer cult founded by the late Frederick Lenz, or Rama. Jim's parents were divorced and both had since remarried. I knew that Jim's father would be an important asset. Initially, Jim's mother was reluctant to contact her ex-husband, but she finally agreed to allow Jim's brother Doug to speak with his father. Doug asked his father to read *Combatting Cult Mind Control*, and he set up a

meeting with the father and his new wife.

Coincidentally, the father's new wife was a practicing Buddhist, and she was able to provide Jim with a frame of reference for comparing Lenz's philosophy with legitimate Buddhist teachings. When I found out that Jim's brother Doug was taking drum lessons from a former member of the Rama cult, I asked Doug to approach the drum teacher and ask for his help.

Jim had always enjoyed the outdoors, so we organized a camping trip. Jim and his old friends sang and reminisced. They began to raise questions about why Jim planned to drop out of college, move to New York, and study computers–a field that didn't interest him before he got involved with Lenz. Jim agreed to join his father on another camping trip. The goal was to have people initiating specific conversations and approaching Jim from different angles.

It culminated with a meeting between Jim and the drum teacher, who told Jim about his experience with the Rama group—spending a great deal of money on Lenz's courses, and learning that Lenz was having sex with his female followers, including the drummer's ex-girlfriend. Jim agreed to meet with me and some former members.

By now, it had become apparent that the core issue for Jim was his spiritual experiences. He had seen a golden light emanating from Lenz. I explained that such hallucinations result from hypnotic processes and are not of spiritual origin. When Jim expressed doubt, I asked him to close his eyes and meditate, as he had been doing with Lenz. When I saw his facial muscles relax, I said, "You're going to meditate deeper than you have ever done before. I don't want you to open your eyes until you're ready to see an even brighter light emanating from me." After a minute, he opened his eyes and said, "Whoa! That's brighter than the light I saw coming from Lenz! That's it! I'm out!" Everyone in the room breathed a sigh of relief.

The SIA creates opportunities and options by drawing on the resources, skills, and knowledge of everyone involved. Friends and family make progress one step at a time through mini-interactions—phone calls, letters, email, or face-to-face visits. This is not the case with deprogramming or exit counseling, which relies on a formal, three-day intervention. However, if you understand older rescue models such as deprogramming, you will know what types of behavior to avoid.

WHAT IS DEPROGRAMMING?

In the early 1970s, Ted Patrick[30] –a man with plenty of street smarts but,

at the time, no formal training in counseling—believed that members of his family were being brainwashed by Moses David Berg, the leader of a group called the Children of God (now known as The Family).[31]

Patrick reasoned that since cults use indoctrination to instill beliefs through hypnosis, repetition, and behavior modification, he would reverse the process. He called the new procedure *deprogramming*.

Deprogramming involves abduction or forced detention. (The term deprogramming also has been used to describe voluntary interventions, though it mostly refers to a forcible process.) Typically, the cult member is driven to a secret location where he is guarded 24/7. He often has no privacy, even in the bathroom. The deprogramming continues for days, sometimes weeks, until the cult member snaps out of the cult's control or until he successfully pretends to do so.

Deprogramming triggers the deepest fears of cult members, fears which have been drilled into them by the cult. Cult members are convinced deprogrammers are the embodiment of evil.[32] *They are heartless, unspiritual people, who might humiliate, threaten, possibly even torture you–and certainly will try to destroy your faith in God.* Family and friends are not to be trusted. The trauma of being kidnapped and imprisoned by strangers creates mistrust, anger, and resentment. Cult doctrine is reinforced.

WENDY'S STORY

Wendy Ford spent seven years as a member of The Way International, a pseudo-Bible survivalist cult founded by Paul Victor Wierwille. Wendy was considered leadership material. She was one of the elite Way Corps–modeled after the Marine Corps–and, after completing the elite training, was posted to a location in Michigan.

When Wendy's family first tried to convince her that she was in a destructive cult, they gathered around the dining-room table and, one by one, shared their objections. The confrontation was orchestrated by her father. Though effective in creating doubt in Wendy, the confrontation lacked the professional support everyone needed. Wendy returned to the cult confused, frightened and–even as the cult had warned her–feeling she could never trust her family again.

The family next decided to try deprogramming, and went before a judge to get an *ex parte* conservatorship. In the early 1970's concerned parents could ask the judge for temporary legal custody. (This high-priced

tool has since been declared illegal, due to cult lobbying as well as legitimate fears that it could be abused.)

Wendy was bribed—by the promise of new contact lenses—to come home for Thanksgiving. The family engaged in traditional family activities for a week. On the last day of her visit, her parents took her out for breakfast.

"When I came home," Wendy recalls, "there was a strange car in the driveway, a strange person at the dining room table, and two strange people with suitcases came down the stairs and told me to get into the car." They drove out of state to a cabin in a remote location. There were guards. Wendy wasn't allowed out of their sight. When one of the guards befriended her, Wendy slipped out—running down a steep hill, hitchhiking, and finding a pay phone where she could call the cult leader. When her parents returned to the site and found she had escaped, they were devastated. This failed deprogramming became a source of great pain for the family, and nearly resulted in divorce for her parents.

The cult leader sent money for a plane ticket back to Michigan. But when Wendy arrived back at the cult, she found her status greatly reduced. Nobody had come to the airport to meet her plane. She was asked to repay the money for her airfare. The cult leaders treated Wendy as though she were culpable. *A Way Corps graduate should never allow such a thing to happen. It's your fault.*

On a freezing cold morning the following winter, she was hitchhiking to work. A car stopped to give her a ride but the car veered off on an exit ramp to a wooded location. The driver was a man with a gun. She was raped, then dropped off at work. Wendy could not tell her family about the rape, and her cult family saw this as another example of her reduced status. Adding to Wendy's trauma and rejection was the fear—fortunately, groundless—that she might be pregnant.

By the time of the second deprogramming, Wendy had slipped into a dangerous depression and was disillusioned about The Way. She could not return to her family and now the cult had turned against her.

In the spring, her parents tried one more rescue attempt. This deprogramming was successful, but also produced long-term trauma. The family was able to obtain another conservatorship. Wendy's father, determined that there be much more preparation, ensured that some ex-Way members were present. The actual deprogramming lasted for a few days. Then she went to a vacation home and started the long, slow road to recovery. Her father insisted she "do her homework" to help the healing and,

this time, Wendy cooperated.

Deprogramming was the first step on a long and difficult journey. For months after finally returning home, when Wendy tried to read something other than The Way propaganda she'd been consuming for seven years, she could not follow the logic of the text. She had problems with insomnia. One night in front of the TV, she remembers, her father joined her and shared his insights: that Wendy must feel like a wartime survivor who regretted having left her comrades in the trenches. If her family had known about the Strategic Interactive Approach, she said, it would have made a world of difference—"Because it invites communication," she says. "It invites awareness. It would have been a huge opportunity for us."

At one point, Wendy's brother became frustrated and lashed out at her. "Why don't you get on with your life instead of sitting around feeling sorry for yourself?" Wendy's father took him aside and said, "It's as if Wendy's been hit by a Mack truck. It takes time to heal."

The other victim was Wendy's spirituality, which had been dealt a blow by the hypocrisy of The Way. Her family had been modest Christians before her cult experience. She now had to find a new path to God.

Despite the lost years, Wendy has come a long way since she was recruited into a cult so many years ago. She's shared her insights in her book, *Recovery from Abusive Groups*.[33] She now understands that families, not just the cult member, need counseling. "How much easier it would have been for all of us if we'd had the method Steve uses now," she says. To its credit, Wendy's family worked hard to understand and support each other.

Eventually, Wendy returned to college and graduated from Harvard University *cum laude*. She went on to graduate school and has worked professionally ever since. When she's under stress, certain scenes still have the power to trigger flashbacks. But ultimately, she says, the experience liberated her.

"One of the extraordinary gifts, when you heal from being in a cult, is you learn that everything is manageable," she says. "It's not always easy, but it's manageable."

In addition to trauma, deprogramming has other drawbacks. For one thing, deprogramming is illegal in the United States if the person is over 18. It is difficult to obtain a conservatorship—which would give parents

temporary power over someone in the grip of a cult—unless the person can be proven to be mentally ill. In the event of failure, criminal charges can be pressed against the family and the deprogrammers. Relationships with family and friends may suffer.

Most importantly with deprogramming, power and control are placed in the hands of an external authority figure. Deprogramming does not typically involve counseling family members, so it doesn't address the damage done to them by the cult experience. Nor does it adequately prepare them for follow-up care. The experience often leaves scars that can take years to heal, if in fact they ever do.

I have met dozens of people who were successfully deprogrammed but still experienced psychological trauma as a result of the methodology. These people were glad to be released from the grip of the cult but were not happy about the method used to free them.

In the 1970's, there were few other options. But by the early 1990's, exit counseling had become the preferred approach.

WHAT IS EXIT COUNSELING?

Most families of cult members don't want to break the law by forcibly kidnapping and detaining their adult son or daughter, and they do not want to risk alienating their loved one. Unlike deprogramming, exit counseling is non-coercive and legal. When handled properly, it employs finesse, not force. It is respectful of the person's free will. Participation is voluntary.

While exit counseling[34] is a huge improvement over deprogramming, it, too, is restricted to simply freeing the cult member. Most exit counselors are former members with no formal training in clinical counseling. (Some exit counselors now refer to themselves as Thought Reform Consultants.) They simply provide information about cults and destructive influence. As with deprogramming, the exit counselor is considered an external authority figure.

Even when successful, the results of exit counseling are often less than optimal. The method doesn't take into account the problems that may have existed before the cult involvement and which may persist. It doesn't deal with psychological issues in the cult member or in the family. There is little room to customize the approach and address underlying issues.

Few people understand that cult indoctrination superimposes a new identity that suppresses and controls the individual's authentic identity.

Relatives and friends think they are having a conversation with the person they have always known when, in fact, they are probably addressing the cult identity. In most traditional exit counseling and deprogramming cases, the cult identity is submerged, but left intact. The pre-cult identity assumes control, but the cult identity is not fully absorbed and integrated into the new post-cult self. Specialized knowledge and training are required to effectively promote healing.

THE STRATEGIC INTERACTIVE APPROACH

The SIA differs from exit counseling in its emphasis on the *process of change*. We learn how to identify factors that make people more vulnerable to destructive influence, such as family tension, unresolved sexual issues, or pre-existing phobias. We create a model of the authentic self that was cultivated for recruitment into the cult identity. This helps us relate to the cult identity and helps us identify and encourage aspects of the cult self that are worth keeping.

The focus of the SIA is on the growth of the family and support network as well as the cult member. Family members and friends are asked to participate in each step of the process, improving their communication skills and enhancing self-awareness. Team members are given tools to attend to their own emotional needs and overcome problems such as phobias or addiction. When each family member is responsible for growth and change, the cult member's perspective changes. Instead of, *I'm the victim, and everyone is here to help me*, it's: *We're a family, and everyone is growing and learning.*

NECESSARY BELIEFS

- Destructive influence is never 100% because it cannot erase a person's authentic self.
- The individual *will* leave the group. It's only a matter of how soon and how easily.
- Real love is stronger than conditional love.
- People want to be free and to know the truth.
- Everything in life can be used as a learning experience.
- Cult behavior is predictable.
- Cults don't deliver what they promise.

· Change and growth are inevitable.

NECESSARY ATTITUDES

Be curious, yet concerned.

Be a good listener. Show that you know that you don't know everything.

Act within your sphere of control. Don't waste your emotions on things you can't change.

Strive for gradual, cumulative progress. Don't just go for the knockout punch.

Work to improve your communication skills.

Do the best you can with the resources you have.

GOAL-ORIENTED COMMUNICATION

In the business world, effective salespeople expend time and effort to develop rapport and trust with a client. In our personal lives, we rarely take the time to develop our relationships with our loved ones.

The SIA helps family and friends shift from an emotion-based form of communication to a goal-oriented style. We will no longer be informal and inadvertently cruel about what we say and do. We will not take our relationships for granted. Our objective is to grow, change, and develop better communication strategies. When we achieve the desired result, we move forward toward the next goal.

- **Goal One:** Build rapport and trust.
- **Goal Two:** Gather information about the pre-cult self, cult self, and the authentic self.
- **Goal Three:** Plant seeds of doubt that may get the member to question his involvement.
- **Goal Four:** Use mini-interactions that will help motivate the cult member to leave.

Learning to understand others

Team members learn to interact with each other in a positive fashion. If one person says something hurtful, I encourage the individual who was hurt to suggest a more constructive response. Each interaction is an opportunity to assess what does and doesn't work. You can gain understanding by role-playing. For instance, I asked a cult member's mother to pretend that she was her daughter:

SH to mother: If you heard your mother say, "You're going out dressed like that?" how would you feel?

Mother: I guess I would think my mother was criticizing the way I looked.

SH: That's what you would think. How would you feel? Would the comment make you feel good about yourself or your mother?

Mother: No, of course not!

Learning to express your emotions

Process-oriented goals move us from a rigid to a flexible state. We find positive, constructive ways to express our concerns.

- Acknowledge the way you feel. Is it helplessness or fear? Anger or hostility? Sadness or depression?

- Respect your emotions as a legitimate expression of who you are and what you value. Dwelling on negative emotions creates conflict, tension and fear.

- Learn how to express emotions in a way that brings you closer to your goals.

In some situations, you will want to speak directly to the person who is affecting you; i.e., parent to cult member, sibling to parent, friend to cult member, client to therapist. Sometimes, it is more helpful to describe your feelings to someone other than the person who's causing the emotion. A Strategic Interactive consultant or counselor can listen and make positive suggestions. Sometimes, it is a matter of finding the most effective way to say something. Or it could be a matter of choosing the right time and place. Over time, you will learn how to adapt your communication style to fit the situation.

Using feedback to create a strategy

The SIA creates wave after wave of feedback and analysis. Over time, family, relatives, and friends consciously adopt this style of communication. After the initial training, I sometimes assign tasks to specific friends and family members. For instance, if a Team member is particularly religious, I might suggest that he and the cult member pray together. Or I might suggest to the father of the cult member that he talk with his son about his own childhood and his relationship with his own father.

After each action, we evaluate the response. Did the prayer build a bridge with the cult member? Depending on the report, I may recommend a longer, deeper prayer the next time they speak. Or I might suggest the religious family member write an email saying how much closer he has felt since they prayed together.

What was the response when the father told his son about his childhood and the issues he had with his father? Tears? A hug? If not, what happened? Was the father standing up, looking out of a window while he was speaking, or was he sitting at eye-level with his son? If the interaction went well, I might suggest a follow–up where the father asks his son, "What could be done now to build a better relationship with you?" The father might need to convince the son that he is a top priority in his father's life.

With every interaction, think of ways to amplify the positives and minimize the negatives. The Strategic Interactive Team develops a repertoire of flexible and creative solutions. Many small and medium-sized shared experiences have a cumulative empowering effect. This work carries us towards a formal Strategic Intervention, if that proves necessary.

The Strategic Interactive Approach takes time and hard work. It also takes inspiration, motivation, creativity, improvisation, flexibility, humor, passion, and commitment. I have file cabinets full of testimonials from family members and ex-cult members who say that participation in the Strategic Interactive gave them a sense of control over the guilt, anxiety, fear, helplessness, and hopelessness that can tear a family apart. The SIA provides a safe environment where building trust is the goal.

SUMMARY:

Pay attention, ask questions, become an "active" listener. Your loved one will tell you what needs to happen for him to leave the group. We want to send the message, "*This is your life. It is your choice whether to stay in or come out. We just want to know that you are the one choosing–that you*

are freely making your own decisions." The interactive process reinforces the cult member's sense of integrity and control.

Deprogramming involves abduction or forced detention. It triggers the deepest fears of cult members, fears that have been drilled into them by the cult. Deprogramming has been discredited.

Exit counseling is non-coercive and legal. It employs finesse, not force and is respectful of the person's free will. Participation is voluntary. But it doesn't offer much assistance with emotional scars or promote long-term healing.

The Strategic Interactive Approach promotes change and encourages growth in the family as well as in the cult member to create conditions that will motivate the cult member to step away from the cult and begin to question his cult involvement. Building trust is an essential first step of a family-centered, process–oriented, customized approach. Building a team of trustworthy, caring people who wish to work together to help empower the individual not only, is hopefully, not only a growth experience for everyone, but is targeted to help the affected individual, and the team can then provide the support system for a beneficial recovery.

Chapter 4

Evaluating the Situation

The Strategic Interactive Approach helps to chart a new course of action based on the circumstances. Because each cult, member, and SIA Team is unique, the approach is customized to fit the situation. Before you take action, consider some fundamental questions: How is the cult member doing? How did he get there in the first place, and how deeply is he involved? What is the destructive potential of the cult? What, exactly, are your concerns and objections to his or her cult involvement? Taking a step-by-step approach–answering each question in turn–will help you think clearly about the situation and articulate your concerns to your loved one.

UNDERSTANDING THE CULT MEMBER

There are three primary reasons why intelligent, educated people with stable backgrounds are drawn to cults. First, there is a pervasive *lack of awareness* about cults and destructive influence. Even when cult issues are covered in the media, destructive influence is frequently ignored or misunderstood. I can't tell you how many times I've been on a talk show where the host asks a cult member, "Are you brainwashed?" The cult member replies, "No, of course not." As if the cult member would say, "Yes, of course!" The stark truth is that the member will not know what had actually happened to him until he is able to step away from the group and learn about destructive influence.

Second, very common life situations *make people vulnerable* to influence and possible recruitment. For example, a person whose parents recently separated or divorced might be more likely to listen to a recruiter who describes his group as one big happy family. Someone whose romantic relationship or marriage has just ended might be more susceptible to come-ons by an attractive person. Other situational factors include the death of a loved one, illness, loss of a job, graduation, and moving to a new location. Situational vulnerabilities occur in everyone's life.

Finally, some individuals have *psychological profiles* that make recruitment easier. Research shows that all of us are susceptible to social influence. Experiments show that people are easily and deeply affected by the roles they play in society, and will alter their behavior accordingly. But, in addition, individuals who are not given to critical thinking are easier

targets. People-pleasers who seek approval are more vulnerable to peer pressure exerted by cult recruiters. Individuals with good concentration and vivid imaginations are more susceptible to hypnotic suggestion.

People with various mental or physical handicaps are more easily drawn in but, on the other hand, cults tend to avoid individuals who are seriously ill or challenged. They want people who will be assets, no strings attached.

Once you have looked at the factors that may have contributed to your loved one's vulnerability, you can begin to assess his current situation. Two critical questions: Where is your loved one living, and how deeply is he involved in the cult?

WHERE IS YOUR LOVED ONE LIVING?

A family member who joins a cult but lives at home presents the opportunity for frequent interactions. Yet, their very closeness may make it more difficult to create and carry out those plans. Family members have to be more discreet–for example, not leaving anti-cult materials around where they might be discovered by the cult member. Some cults actually tell members to look through their parents' checkbooks or go through telephone bills to see if any contact has been made with known critics. Be careful to make sure all of your passwords are secure, especially to your email and computer.

Other cult members may live apart from the family. If they share living space, do they live solely with other cult members? If so, have you befriended the other people? If they have their own place, do they live alone? If so, this is a good sign because there is some measure of privacy. Do they live with a spouse and children who are not in the cult? This is also good. There is less environmental control by the cult. Another important question is whether the person works for non-cult businesses and receives a paycheck? The more independent a person is, financially and physically, the less controlled he is by the cult.

If your loved one happens to live in an isolated, communal cult where most outside communication is cut off, seek alternate sources of contact. Use the Internet wisely and discreetly to network with other families who have loved ones in the group, and with experts and critics who may have up-to-date information about the cult's activities. If you know where the cult is located, you might look for a local clergyman or police chief who can help. When dealing with extremist, insular cults, ex-members will be especially helpful. At Freedom of Mind, we can be the interface to

seek them out, hold mini-interactions with them to help them understand destructive influence, and ask their help about how to gain entry. Sometimes we can find a former member of the cult who may not be seen as a threat by current members. They might be seen as potential returnees and, thus, able to act as agents of the family.

What if I have no idea where my loved one is?

Knowing the group or leader is an important first step. Again, former members may render invaluable assistance. Seek them out carefully. You might want to use a pseudonym, especially when dealing with groups that want to isolate cult members from their families. If you fail to protect your identity, they could make things difficult–for example, by concealing your loved one's whereabouts. If you don't feel comfortable using a pseudonym, perhaps friends or other relatives may be willing to do the front-line work. You can email the different counter-cult organizations listed on my Web site. At Freedom of Mind we can be the interface for you, if you wish.

If you have the financial resources, you should consider hiring a licensed private investigator or P.I. I have been working on cases with Larry Zilliox for over twenty years and recommend him highly. His book *Investigating Extremists: A Manual for Law Enforcement*, is worth a read. [35]

If you are on a tight budget, and are prepared to do the work yourself, buy Dennis King's *Get the Facts on Anyone*. [36] This book contains useful information about finding missing persons, and reveals many of the techniques used by professionals.

If you know where the cult member is, but all contact is refused, in some special circumstances, I might recommend finding the right person to try appealing for help directly to the cult leader or sub-leader. Leaders who seek legitimacy may be receptive to your plea. Sometimes, a friend or family might be advised to write to the effect: *I'm contacting you to ask for your help. I know that your group believes in God/the family/ love/goodness, but I am worried about my son/daughter. I know I've made mistakes. I have said and done hurtful things. I am truly sorry about this. I have been losing sleep and I am at my wit's end. Please, would you consider talking to my son or daughter and imploring him/her to see us/ talk with us/ visit with us? I would be so grateful.* [But do not use this verbatim.]

If the cult member cuts off contact because of an unsuccessful intervention attempt, apologize, promise never to do it again, and ask forgiveness. My recommendation is to ask the cult member, "What do I

need to do to regain your trust?" Listen carefully to what they say and do what makes sense to accommodate their suggestions.

HOW DEEPLY IS YOUR LOVED ONE INVOLVED?

A new cult member who is in the honeymoon phase will typically be harder to convince to leave since he has mostly positive associations with the group. Try making contact with other members. Meet the cult member's friends, taking notice of their names. Ask where they are from. Befriend them. Also pay special attention to older members who often have valuable stories about the group's past. For example, an older member may privately tell you, "Oh yeah, I remember when Armageddon was supposed to happen. That was ten years ago." You may be able to use this kind of information later to reality-test with your loved one.

Long–term members are actually sometimes much easier to help, since they have already experienced many lies, contradictions and letdowns. Also, most long–term members know people who have left the group. You may ask them, "Do you think it's possible to leave for legitimate reasons? Do you know anyone who ever left the group? Did they leave for legitimate reasons? Would you be open to talking with them about why they left?"

If someone was born into a cult, it could take years to decide to leave. But remember, many disillusioning experiences take place inside cult groups. As long as the member knows that there are people on the outside who care about him, he will feel that he has a choice. Create positive, loving experiences for him. Patiently show him alternative ways of living. For example, when Jehovah's Witnesses see that people who leave still believe in God, study the Bible, and lead moral lives, it is very persuasive.

Invite your loved one home. If he is in a group like the Jehovah's Witnesses, invite him to a party, not a birthday party. Send gifts and try to pick items that your loved one will use more than once—clothing, for example. It will continually remind him of you.

Make an effort to keep in regular contact. A picture postcard with a positive association and a message that says, "I miss you," or "I love you. Please write back," is better than doing nothing. Even if your letters and cards go unanswered, each piece of mail will remind him that you still care. Keep copies of everything!

What is the profile of the individual's pre-cult self?

To analyze your loved one's pre-cult self, start by writing your thoughts in a

chronological outline, if possible. Think about relationships he has had with different people (grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, friends). Think about places you used to live, or vacation. Think about activities he enjoyed, like sports, music, exercise, reading, or movies.

Consider your loved one's strengths and weaknesses. For example, on a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate his self-esteem before cult involvement? Did he have interests, hobbies, athletic skills, art, music? How old was he when he joined? Did he have clear-cut goals? Did he have friends? Did he communicate well with others? ADD or ADHD? Other learning disabilities? Asperger's syndrome?

What is the profile of the cult identity?

Start by talking with other cult members and get a good picture of their beliefs, language, and behaviors. Talk with former members. Begin to assess the cult identity of your loved one. How long has he been involved? What jobs has he performed? Make a list of the person's work history in the cult. If you don't know, ask. Is he a recruiter, or does he work in one of the group's businesses? Is he still rank-and-file after ten years? Was he once a leader, but has since been demoted? What kind of access does he have to the head of the group? Where is he stationed? Is he at the headquarters or at a satellite location?

The better you understand your loved one's authentic self and his cult identity, the easier it will be to help him.

EVALUATING THE DESTRUCTIVE POTENTIAL OF THE CULT

Now, let's turn our attention to the cult itself. A good place to start looking for information about the destructive potential of a group is at the top. You should ask:

1. Who is the leader? What is his personal history? Was he ever married? Has he been divorced? Does he have children?
2. What are the leader's credentials? Does he have a criminal history? A psychiatric history?
3. What kind of education, training, or occupation did he have before starting the group? Was he ever in a destructive cult?
4. Does the leader make claims of exclusive wisdom, power, and spirituality?
5. Are there any checks and balances of power in place?
6. What has the cult leader written or said in speeches?

Comparing the leader of your loved one's group to the leader of a mainstream organization may give you an idea of how dangerous the person is. For example, Moses David Berg, the now deceased leader of The Family, claimed that he was an Apostle. At one point he encouraged women in his group to become "Happy Hookers for Jesus." He also encouraged sex with children—not surprising, perhaps, when one learns that Berg fled the United States after being indicted for child molestation. True religious leaders like the Pope or Billy Graham would denounce such behavior as gross immorality.

Another example is self-proclaimed Buddhist enlightened master, Frederick Lenz, aka Rama, who told his followers that they should make a lot of money, drive expensive cars, cut off contact with their family and friends, and hide their own thoughts and feelings to keep others from draining them of their energies.[37] Lenz demanded money from people in exchange for his energy and protection. He looked down on other approaches to Buddhism. In stark contrast to Lenz is the Dalai Lama, the spiritual leader of Tibet, who lives a life that emphasizes love, compassion, service, and connection to other living things. The Dalai Lama is humble and inclusive in his approach and appreciates all of the world's religions, as well as secular beliefs.

Use the Internet to search for information about the leader as well as the group. Question former members. Videotapes of past television shows may yield useful insights. For example, on a Larry King show, Frederick Lenz denied being an enlightened being—yet that was his claim to his followers. During a *Dateline* interview, he couldn't answer basic questions about the computer business he owned.

ORGANIZATION

The structure of a group tells you something about the balance of power. In general, destructive cults can be seen as having a pyramid shape, with a charismatic leader at the pinnacle and underlings arrayed below him. A small core of advisors typically manage cult businesses. Below them may be a somewhat larger group of sub-leaders. Below the—at the wide base of the triangle—is the general membership.

In groups where the leader has been dead for years, a small cadre of devoted followers may have filled the void. In any case, when a leader with a questionable background organizes a group so that power is totally

centralized, you can assume it is a destructive cult. Renowned Christian apologist Norman Geisler puts it this way: "Whenever you have an individual who claims a direct pipeline with God and has no accountability, if you don't have a cult today, you will have one tomorrow."[38]

When evaluating the structure of a group, pay attention to the following: Who are the people in charge, and what kind of power do they have over your loved one? Is the group small or large (hundreds, thousands, millions of people)? Where is its center? Is it cut off from the world or is it seeking legitimacy? How does the group get its money? From donations or fundraising? Is the group organized as a non-profit? Does it own businesses?

How does the group spend its money? Does it use it to mount public relations campaigns? Does it hire teams of lawyers to stifle its critics through legal harassment? In cases where a group claims to have open accounting records, does it provide public access? If people are afraid to ask, what does this say about the atmosphere of the group?

Another issue is the freedom of members to leave the group: Are members made to fear the thought of leaving? Are members isolated? Have they been cut off from family members? Are members emotionally or financially dependent on the group?

DOCTRINE

In the Strategic Interactive Approach, we look at the way a group behaves, not what it believes. Even so, doctrine should be taken into account in assessing its destructive power. In general, the more extreme the claims, beliefs, and prophecies (Armageddon, flying saucers), the greater the potential for abuse. The most dangerous groups change doctrine at the whim of the leader. Usually, the more developed and codified a doctrine, the more stable the group.

In the past, some mainstream religious organizations have supported cults in legal struggles because they appear to share similar beliefs. For example, if a Bible cult believes that Jesus is the Lord, or when Sun Myung Moon says that he promotes family values, mainstream religious leaders often assume that the organization is legitimate. Some cults use their deep pockets to help the ministries of individuals such as Jerry Falwell, and then use that person to help gain legitimacy.[39] This creates a façade of respectability which can be quite convincing.

You may come across cult pamphlets and websites that make it seem as

though religious scholars and mainstream religious organizations support them in the name of freedom of religion. Cult leaders like to call the anti-cult movement a witch hunt. It is in the interests of cults to raise controversy, and they frequently claim they are being persecuted for their beliefs. But destructive groups change the truth to fit the situation. Legitimate groups do not need to alter their doctrine to deceive the public.

Other important questions to ask: Is there an *insider* doctrine and an *outsider* doctrine—that is, a doctrine for the elect in the group and a doctrine for public consumption? Does truth change at different levels within the group hierarchy?

IDENTIFYING YOUR CONCERNS

After evaluating your loved one's involvement and the destructiveness of the group, it is time to prepare yourself for interaction. This will include looking outward—at the cult and your loved one—as well as looking inward. Some of your concerns about your loved one's cult involvement may take on a life of their own, generating stress and anxiety. Try to stay calm and keep a clear head. Only then will you be able to communicate in such a way that you will be heard by your loved one.

What are your concerns?

As I have said, it is both common and natural for emotions—particularly fear, anger and frustration—to muddle family members' thinking. It is essential that each family member and friend take the time to clarify concerns about the loved one by writing them down. Some families spend years avoiding the realization that their loved one is in a cult. The act of writing removes any remnants of denial.

I suggest planning at least one family meeting with the express purpose of writing down a list of concerns. During this meeting, each family member should take notes. Audio or videotape recording can be used to document the meeting, unless someone objects. Taping is a good way of including people not physically present at a meeting. This meeting should be kept confidential and private. At some point, the cult member will be told about the meeting, but be careful not to jeopardize your efforts early on by being loose-lipped.

I remember one meeting where I asked a cult member's mother, "What do you say to her when she asks what you think of her involvement with the

cult?" She answered, "Well, I tell her that everything is fine, that she's an adult and can do whatever she wants to do." The woman didn't realize that, while she was speaking, she was emphatically shaking her head from left to right, indicating a subconscious *No*. Recognizing nonverbal cues like these, by watching ourselves in a mirror or on videotape, can help us understand and express ourselves more effectively.

Your list of concerns should encompass both broad and specific behaviors. An example of a broad concern would be: *My daughter doesn't seem to be able to think or act for herself.* An example of a specific behavior would be: *She never comes home by herself. She always insists on bringing another cult member.* You may include examples of how your loved one lied to you, by omission, distortion, or outright falsehood.

Negative changes in behavior

Families often claim their loved one seems like a different person. If this is your concern, be clear and precise about specific behavior that is uncharacteristic. Depending on the person, uncharacteristic behavior may include lying, breaking a promise to come home for a visit, not coming home for visits at all, not answering letters or phone calls, or not initiating contact. If the individual has been involved for a long time, there could be hundreds of examples of uncharacteristic behaviors such as giving up a healthy diet in favor of junk food, going into dangerous neighborhoods to canvas for money, or not paying bills and taxes.

Positive changes in behavior

Not all cult behavior is negative. For example, most religious cult groups discourage the use of alcohol or drugs. If the person stopped smoking cigarettes because of their involvement in the group, this should be acknowledged as a positive change. If the person used to be slovenly and is now very neat, compliment him. If he never exercised and now is very fit, make note of it. Expressing such observations is important because it demonstrates fairness and builds rapport.

To Do

- Write down what you don't like about your loved one's involvement with this group.
- On general principle, what bothers you about it?
- What specific behavior is objectionable?
- Make a chronological list of concerns. Are they escalating as time goes by?
- Prioritize your list. Which three concerns are most important?
- Make a list of uncharacteristic behaviors.
- Assess whether communicating a specific concern will be effective or ineffective, and concentrate on the effective

EVALUATION CHECKLIST

Health

- Is he eating properly?
- Is he getting enough sleep?
- Does he have health insurance?
- Would he receive good medical care if sick or injured?

Prior Commitments

- Education: *He had one term to complete to get his college diploma but he walked away. We can't believe it! No amount of rational argument will convince him to finish.*
- Career/Goals: *She was planning to become a doctor. Now she stands on street corners recruiting new members.*
- Significant relationships: *They were going to be married and he broke off the engagement.*

Financial

- Surrendering Assets: *He is spending his life savings on cult-sponsored classes and events.*
- Dependency Issues: *He has no money of his own–even though he works 20 hours a day.*

Has There Been Radical Personality Change?

- Physical appearance: change in clothes, hair, weight, diet; glassy stare
- Personality: change in speech patterns, facial expressions, or mannerisms; decreased sense of humor; secretive, evasive, or defensive behavior; judgmental attitude towards family members; fanatical – always proselytizing; change from extrovert to introvert or vice versa; change from analytical to magical-thinking; change from lazy to industrious; change in level of honesty; lack of interest in former hobbies
- Personal habits: change from irresponsible to responsible; change from sloppy to clean; change from tardy to punctual
- Communication style: evasive, defensive, difficulty in communication; use of buzzwords or canned speeches
- Relationships: change in key relationships; family and friends preached to as though they need to be saved; pressed for money for group donations; loss of contact with family and friends (personal, telephone, or email); decreased physical contact – fewer or no hugs

and kisses; self-imposed isolation; family events unattended or unacknowledged (birthdays, baptisms, Confirmations, Bar/Bas Mitzvahs, engagements, weddings, anniversaries, illnesses, deaths); majority of time spent with group
- Philosophy: change in political beliefs; change in religious beliefs; change in current education (from full- to part-time, switches majors, dropped out of school)
- Career: abruptly ends career; radical change of goals
- Medical: ignores symptoms; doesn't go to doctor; ignores doctor's advice
- Change in living conditions: move to new residence (group house, commune) or new location; move in with strangers

SUMMARY:

What makes a person vulnerable to cults?

- Pervasive *lack of awareness* about cults and destructive influence
- *Situations* where a person is facing stress or major disappointment
- Psychology–all of us are susceptible to social influence. Individuals who are not prone to critical thinking are easier targets. Those who seek approval are more vulnerable. Individuals with good concentration and vivid imaginations are more susceptible to hypnotic suggestion.
- People with various mental or physical handicaps may be more easily drawn in, but cults want people who will be assets without burdens.
- Cult members have a pre-cult and a cult identity that needs to be understood.
- Each cult needs to be evaluated to understand its leadership, organization and doctrine.
- Your concerns play in important role in planning how to approach your loved one. It is crucial to understand what you think and feel.
- There are many aspects of the situation that need to be evaluated to form a solid picture of the current circumstances.

Chapter 5

Building the Team

Friends and family members who are motivated by love will find their resources are limitless when they work together. Of course, it is natural to feel intimidated if you alone are trying to help a cult member—particularly when that person is an adult and insists he is happy. It may seem that the cult has a great advantage in terms of money and manpower. It does. But even if your loved one is of special importance to the leaders, they will not care about him the way you do. Individual members usually get very little attention from the top leaders who, typically, have more important matters to focus on. If you involve as many friends and relatives as possible to build an effective team, over time, you will have the advantage.

A Strategic Interactive Approach Team is a support network, not only for the cult member but for everyone affected by his involvement. The Team will be there to talk with the cult member, help you with mini-interactions and interventions, and, ultimately, assist in your loved one's recovery. Each case presents a unique set of challenges and every person involved makes a significant contribution. When they work together and support each other, Team members are given the opportunity to reorganize the family system in ways that can make each person's life better.

A Family Affair

I'm often surprised at how quickly an SIA Team, once set in motion, can evolve. A few years ago, after giving a lecture at a New Age program center in the Boston area, I was approached by a woman in her 20s who asked me what I thought of a female guru-led group.[40] I said I had grave concerns about the group, and told her about a website that was created by a former 17-year member. She told me how she had been introduced to the group as a young child, by her mother. She had even spent a couple of years in India, where she had a disillusioning set of experiences that led to her decision to leave the group. She was still having problems, though, and felt conflicted about her mother, who was a respected American leader in the organization. The young woman later called and asked me to help her. We proceeded and she later asked me to work with her mother.

Because she and her mother had always been very close, she felt she

had enough rapport to approach her mother directly and ask for a three-day meeting. But, while we were preparing for the intervention, she hesitantly asked me whether or not she should contact her brother. Of course, I suggested that she contact him–especially since he had been very critical of their involvement with the cult. She and her brother were having trouble getting along. I told her, "Your mother is still involved with this group and we know your brother has criticized it. Tell him what you're up to and see if he's willing to participate." Fortunately, he was willing.

A few days after the intervention, her brother telephoned me. He sounded confused, faltering and stumbling over each word. After a prolonged silence, I asked him what he wanted to say. He proceeded to tell me that he was in total shock because he'd realized that a group he had been involved with for years was a secretive cult. He begged me not to say anything, especially to his sister or mother. Of course, I agreed. This was a small group of about 100 men and women, he said, and no outsiders knew that it existed. Even his fiancée, who had lived with him for a number of years, did not know that he was involved. When she asked about his frequent meetings, he told her that he was attending a special class that involved acting, and he couldn't really discuss it. Unsurprisingly, his involvement had become a major source of friction in their relationship.

I asked him to tell me more about this group, whose leaders claimed to be following the teachings of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky.[41] Previously, I had spoken with people who had been involved with a different cult group supposedly based on the same philosophy. The brother asked to have some sessions with me and sort through his experience. (He later married his fiancée, and they now have two lovely children.)

So while doing an intervention with the woman's mother in a guru cult, we found out that her brother was involved with another destructive group. Of course, I encouraged him to talk with his sister and mother as well as his father, who was a respected Buddhist teacher, about his cult involvement. The mother eventually chose to leave the group, and the family grew closer than ever. She has assisted others in leaving the cult. She helped me with a woman involved in Aum Shinrikyo, the so-called Buddhist group responsible for sarin nerve gas attacks in Japan in 1994-95.

About a year later, I received a phone call from a woman who saw my name in a *Boston Globe* story about Scientology and the Internet.[42] Her fiancée had just broken off an engagement because he refused to tell her about his secret meetings. She thought he was having an affair or was already married, but when she read the article, something clicked for her.

She contacted me. A light went on in my head and I realized that it reminded me of this previous situation. I called the brother and it turned out that he knew her fiancée from the organization. I coached her and the two men spoke with each other by telephone. She and I later met with her fiancée and did some counseling together. He, too, chose to leave the group and the two of them are still together.

Cults succeed because they trap recruits in an all-encompassing web. But the uniformity of a cult is also one of its weaknesses because it makes the group predictable in its actions. An SIA Team, on the other hand, can be creative, flexible and unpredictable. The more people who want to help, the more options you have.

When approaching potential Team members, you may find that some people are reluctant to participate or are opposed to the goals of the Strategic Interactive Approach. Some people are in denial about the existence of a problem. The psychological mechanism of denial—protection against unpleasant truths—can operate with other major problems like alcoholism, drug abuse, or compulsive gambling. An effective way to start working through denial is by gathering information. Talk with former cult members, experts, and other families with cult problems, as well as concerned family and friends about their experiences. Ask the person who is in denial: "What proof would you need to be convinced that there is a problem?"

Many potential Team members will know little or nothing about destructive cults when you first approach them. It may be that family members and friends are not in denial but, rather, have erroneous beliefs that block the path to any meaningful dialogue or fruitful action. Some of your loved one's friends may have been alienated by the cult identity. Relatives may say they don't want to interfere; others may not believe that mind control is possible. But with education and encouragement, these individuals may become effective members of the Team.

REFUTING ERRANT BELIEFS

You need to know how to address other people's misconceptions and, eventually, articulate these issues to the cult member. To help you prepare, I have identified 10 of the most common fallacies about destructive cults.

1. "THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS MIND CONTROL."

People who reject out of hand the existence of destructive influence usually have distorted conceptions about its techniques. *Nobody can erase your*

personality and turn you into a brainwashed zombie, is one common belief. Yet, as we have seen, a cult does not erase a person's authentic self but rather creates a dominant cult identity that suppresses individual will. Understanding cult mind control depends on making this critical distinction between the cult identity and the authentic identity.

In Chapter Two of this book, "What is Destructive Influence?" there are three models to explain what we mean by the term. Also useful is the reading material for Dr. Philip Zimbardo's Stanford University Psychology course *The Psychology of Mind Control*. As mentioned earlier, the diagnostic manual for the American Psychiatric Association has a category, Atypical Dissociative Disorder 300.15, that uses the words *cults* and *brainwashing*.

It is true that destructive influence does not affect all people with equal force. Individuals in the same cult can experience different levels of influence. Some cult members may look glassy-eyed and zombie-like, but this is often the result of sleep deprivation or malnutrition. If the member's cult identity seems healthy, it could be co-opting the talents and skills of the authentic self. The result is that, to the untrained eye, cult members can appear completely normal. Asking questions that test a person's thoughts and free will is the only way to evaluate the extent of destructive influence.

Some argue that people do sometimes simply leave cult groups and, therefore, destructive influence does not exist. But these people may have become ill or disillusioned, or been rejected. The fact that people escape does not mean that destructive influence doesn't exist–it just means it is not absolute. Since a person's authentic self is not erased, but merely suppressed, it is always possible for people to break away.

Most of us can relate to destructive influence in one way or another. If a potential Team member has trouble understanding mind control, the following questions might help them identify situations they may have encountered:

- Have you ever trusted or fallen in love with someone who lied, manipulated and took advantage of you?
- Did you ever stay in a relationship in which you felt controlled and disrespected?
- Have you ever been hypnotized or watched other people being hypnotized?

- Did you ever do something you didn't want to do (donate money, have sex, smoke cigarettes, use drugs) because someone pressured you to do it?

- Have you ever bought a product you didn't need or want and then realized how many advertisements for that item you had seen or heard?

By asking some of these questions, you might stimulate the person to start equating some of these experiences to cult control. Since influence can be seen as varying in degree, it is easy to see how extreme methods can produce extreme results.

2. "EVERYTHING IS MIND CONTROL."

Mind control is everywhere, the reasoning goes—in psychotherapy, advertising, education, and the military, for example—so it must be acceptable. When we generalize and say that everything is mind control, all distinctions are lost. A more productive model is to think in terms of a continuum of influence: at one end, respectful, ethical, growth-enhancing influence that recognizes the value of individuality, human rights, and creativity; at the other end, conformity, dependency, and slavery, where all authority lies with the leader and the group.

Mental health professionals use their knowledge of the mind to influence their clients, but the locus of control remains with the client, not the therapist. If a person has been severely affected by mental illness, or a major psychological problem, he may need to depend on authority figures until he can become strong. There are also poorly-trained and unethical therapists who foster dependency for self-serving reasons.

Advertising has a profound impact on our lives—economic, cultural, and social. Advertisers use sophisticated psychological methods to manipulate our desires, thoughts, and behaviors. The goal is to create a need where none previously existed, or to amplify a need. Becoming conscious of the power of advertising, or simply ignoring it, are the most efficient ways to minimize negative effects.

Some educational systems are designed to indoctrinate rather than educate. They demand conformity and obedience. But other educational systems encourage students to think for themselves, be creative, and respect themselves and others. Educational systems that use fear and guilt—and

focus on competition and conformity—produce ready candidates for destructive cults. Students should be taught critical thinking skills and be encouraged to oppose blind conformity. Education should also encourage students to think from different perspectives.

The military is an example of a highly structured, pyramid-shaped organization. There is a strict hierarchy. Soldiers are assigned numbers, given identical haircuts and uniforms, and told how to talk, walk, march and fight. In boot camp, particularly in the Marines, the SEALs and other Special Forces, the use of mind control techniques is considered essential to create the identity of an elite soldier.[43]

But unlike a destructive cult, the military provides a service to society. Military leaders must answer to other branches of government. The military is governed by ethical codes and structural checks and balances. People join the military for a specified length of time and receive pay and benefits. With a few unfortunate exceptions, the military does not use deception in its recruiting. When people join the military, they know what will be expected of them. Soldiers are encouraged to maintain contact with their families and friends, and vacation time is scheduled annually.

When people endure rigorous training such as medical or law school, the military, or the priesthood, they are making a conscious career choice. The training enhances their identity and offers knowledge and skills and various benefits. A person deceptively recruited into a destructive cult is immediately subjected to a process of tearing down, rejecting, and reprogramming the authentic identity. The person does not receive much in the way of personal benefits, and there is no institutional way to exit with honor.

3. "WHY SHOULD I DO ANYTHING? HE SAYS HE'S HAPPY!"

Members of the Heaven's Gate cult each made videotaped farewell statements that explained why they had decided to leave their vehicles–i.e., their bodies–and commit suicide. All of them claimed that they were exercising their own free will, and that they were happy to die.

It is unwise to accept at face value a cult member's words that he is happy. In a cult, happiness is often redefined as sacrifice or suffering. Happiness in Heaven's Gate was overcoming individuality and human nature and suicide was redefined as advancing to the next level. Ingesting fatal pills with applesauce and vodka, and placing plastic bags over their heads was seen as a necessary stage of the

metamorphosis. The *cult identity* was happy to die.

But, as we have learned, this cult identity was deliberately concocted to suit someone else's aims. It does not represent the whole individual. You might tell those who are taken in by the cult identity to look behind the smiling mask. When the member says he is happy, the cult self is doing what it has been taught to do.

When I was in the cult, I told everyone that I was happier than I had ever been in my life. For a Moonie, being close to God is happiness, and God is defined as a suffering parent. The more you feel God's suffering heart and the more you sacrifice, the happier you will be. By this Orwellian logic, happiness is suffering and suffering is happiness.

If potential Team members believe the cult member is happy, encourage them to ask follow-up questions: What do you mean when you say you are happy? If you were unhappy, would you admit it to yourself? Would you tell us if you were unhappy? What would make you feel unhappy enough to walk away from the group?

4. "HE'S AN ADULT. WE HAVE NO RIGHT TO INTERFERE."

It is normal for people to resist interfering in the lives of their adult relatives or friends. In fact, the law states that once people reach the age of majority (usually 18), they are responsible for their actions. However, cult influence impairs an individual's capacity for mature decision-making. Especially at the beginning of the cult involvement, family members and friends know that something is wrong. But they often back off when the adult cult member says, *Don't tell me what to do. I am an adult. Don't try to control my life.* People don't realize that this is a tactic to neutralize objections.

The fact that a person is of legal age does not mean that he is functioning as a responsible adult. Under hypnosis, a person can be age-regressed to childhood. The individual thinks, feels, and acts like a child. It is common for cult leaders to ask members to become like children for God. An essential aspect of the cult identity is the naiveté of a child. By taking advantage of the desire for childlike innocence, cults undermine the mature mind.

If a friend or family member questions his right to interfere, remind him that his love gives him the right to be concerned. If a loved one is under the influence of destructive influence, relatives and friends have the right and the obligation to take steps to undo the process. Once the cult member has an opportunity to learn about and recognize the features of destructive

cults, and meet with former members and critics, he will be in a position to make an informed choice.

5. "HE HAS THE RIGHT TO BELIEVE WHAT HE WANTS TO BELIEVE."

If a person wants to believe that David Koresh is Christ, or that Sun Myung Moon and Hak Ja Han are the perfect True Parents, they are entitled to do so. In a free society, people are free to believe whatever they like. But at the same time, they should be protected from destructive influence and manipulation.

As we have seen, members may seem to be exercising their own free will, but this is an illusion. When people in a controlled environment are subjected to psychosocial influences—like group conformity or behavior modification techniques—they can be manipulated into accepting a completely different belief system. Social scientists have conducted experiments that graphically demonstrate how a person's beliefs can become pliable under the right set of social circumstances. Because cult techniques are more sophisticated and invasive than the methods used in these studies, cult indoctrination is even more effective in suppressing a person's free will.

For anyone born into a belief system–religious, political or other–there comes a time when they should challenge and test assumptions. This process applies not just to cult members. It is a necessity for all mature, responsible people.

6. "HE'S TOO INTELLIGENT TO JOIN A CULT."

This was my mother's response in 1974 when I dropped out of college, quit my job, donated my bank account, and moved into the Moon center in Queens, New York. She was trying to reconcile how her son, an honors student, could be foolish enough to be taken in by a cult and accept its inane beliefs. She thought I would see through it, quickly and independently.

Many people have a hard time believing that bright, talented people–often educated, and from good homes–could fall under the control of a cult. They fail to realize that cults intentionally recruit smart people who will work tirelessly for the cause. Many of the former cult members I have met are exceptionally bright and well educated. They have active imaginations and creative minds. They have a capacity to focus their attention and concentrate. Most are idealistic and socially conscious. They want to make a positive contribution to the world.

7. "HE MUST BE WEAK, OR LOOKING FOR EASY ANSWERS. HE NEEDS SOMEONE TO TELL HIM WHAT TO DO."

This is a very commonly held, but fallacious, generalization about cult members. People often try to find fault with people who experience tragedy by *blaming the victim*. Laying blame gives people a false sense of control over their own lives by distancing them from the victim. However, the idea that people knowingly join destructive cults is patently wrong. Most cult recruits are recruited at a vulnerable moment, without understanding the forces that are being brought to bear on them. Sometimes a cult manipulates a recruit's strength. For example, by playing to my high degree of self-confidence, the Moonies managed to get me, and keep me, at their three-day workshop.

There is no doubt that many people in cults have emotional baggage and other assorted problems; most people do. But focusing the blame for cult membership on the individual is a mistake.

8. "SHE'S BETTER OFF WHERE SHE IS."

Sometimes family, friends, and even mental health professionals will think that a person is better off in the cult. It may be tempting to agree, particularly when a person has stopped abusing drugs or alcohol, or when a person is no longer being physically or sexually abused.

A cult may provide temporary shelter from traumatic circumstances, but cult involvement doesn't cure anyone's problems. It substitutes unethical control for legitimate help. Destructive influence is a form of psychological abuse. In the hands of a cult leader, such techniques can be devastating to an individual's psyche. By inducing a dissociative state and creating a dominant cult identity, cults repress the real issues of the pre-cult and authentic identities. The cult member's past problems with family members and friends are used to break contact, rather than to resolve past hurt. When people leave a cult, all of these pre-cult issues, along with the problems caused by membership in a destructive cult, resurface.

If a person's pre-cult life was unhealthy and traumatic, ethical psychotherapy can set them on a path towards healing by facilitating positive growth and change, building self-esteem, learning how to trust themselves and others, and developing better strategies for coping with life's issues.

There are reputable programs that can help a person overcome a drug or alcohol addiction. These are healthier and safer than destructive cults,

because they encourage clients to think for themselves, to stay in touch with their own feelings and needs, and to be part of a meaningful community, without indoctrination.

9. "HE'LL LEAVE ON HIS OWN WHEN HE IS READY."

This attitude presumes that the cult member has the resources and ability to leave. As we shall see, one vital step of the Strategic Interactive Approach is to remove the phobias that keep the cult member imprisoned. It is important to try to speed up the process because, the longer the person stays in a cult, the more damage is done to the fabric of his life.

Former members often express anguish over damage done to their psyches and to important relationships. They feel sorry about lost educational and career opportunities. Even worse, they feel guilty about the people they recruited, the money they collected, and their unethical behavior while members. The longer they stay involved, the deeper the regrets. A passive, wait-and-see approach can have tragic consequences. Few people suspected that a UFO cult like Heaven's Gate would end in a mass suicide.

10. "WE'VE LOST HOPE."

Giving up is a dysfunctional coping mechanism. If family members and friends no longer believe that the person will leave the group, then, at least, they will no longer be living with disappointment. Some people have told me that they grieve for their loved one as if he had already died.

Negative beliefs can become self-fulfilling prophecies. Family and friends must believe that their loved one will inevitably leave the cult. Hope can sustain and motivate them through the ups and downs of the rescue process. They can build a support system that includes others who have successfully helped their loved ones escape.

I have encountered many people like Ray Franz, who left the Jehovah's Witnesses after 60 years. Despite the problems, they are invariably glad to be free.

Even if you do not know where your friend or loved one is living, you can be a part of the solution. Every person in a cult is someone's relative or friend. You can make time to interact positively in the lives of other cult members—individuals in the same group as your loved one, as well as people in other groups—even if you have lost contact with your loved one. The person you help today may be the one who helps you later.

* * *

WHO SHOULD BE PART OF THE TEAM?

The first step in assembling a Team is to determine who is willing and who is unwilling to help. You can start by making a list of all potential Team members. From this list, you can start to contact and educate those people who are most likely to be effective Team members.

Making the Short List

The core of the Team will usually consist of immediate family members and close friends. The family may be intact, divorced, or blended. People from broken families sometimes worry that contact could open old wounds. But years of experience have shown me that family members usually find a way to overcome past differences by focusing on the needs of the cult member. I've often seen families who were split by divorce, mothers and fathers who hadn't spoken politely to one another in 10 years, coming together and sitting in the same room, helping one another, listening to one another, and working toward a common goal.

Next, add to your list:

- Friends and significant relatives
- Contacts from the pre-cult life
- Other families with loved ones in the cult
- Ex-members of your loved one's group and other cults
- Anyone who cares about the cult member and who can be trusted

I have found that counter-cult activism can bring together the most unlikely assortment of people. I've had an automobile mechanic who was very hands-on in his approach working beside a philosophy professor. I've seen the Orthodox Jew, Evangelical Christian, atheist, agnostic, humanist, Muslim, Buddhist, grandparents and young children, police, therapists, politicians, media and people from all over the world collaborating and helping one another.

Criteria for choosing team members

The family will decide which persons would be effective team members. Potential Team members should be honest with you and agree not to reveal your efforts while the person in still affiliated with the cult. They should be willing to make a commitment. They should have, or be able to develop, a high degree of rapport and trust with the cult member and with other Team members.

People who genuinely care—for example, a sister who wants to help her brother—will be the most sincere and effective Team members. People who dwell on their own needs—for example, a girlfriend who wants him back for selfish reasons, or relatives who are embarrassed by his involvement—will be less effective, and could make the process more difficult. You need to confront and educate people about the importance of concern for the cult member's well-being. Only those who are willing to put the needs of the cult member first should be part of the Team.

Although no two Team members will look at the person's cult involvement in the same way, you will begin to see patterns of positive and negative thinking as you begin the process of building the Team. Some people's attitudes will bring you closer to your goals, while others will work against your efforts.

Attitudes that Enhance Success

- Belief that the individual will leave the group eventually
- Belief in the cult member's integrity, intelligence and creativity
- Belief in your and others' commitment and resourcefulness
- Belief in God, or some greater force that gives you strength, solace and hope (if you aren't an atheist, that is)
- Patience, flexibility, and determination

"Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of overcoming it." —Helen Keller

Attitudes that Undermine Success

- Rigidity, stubbornness, arrogance, embarrassment
- Hopelessness, panic, hysteria
- Criticism and judgment (*I'm right, you're wrong*)
- Anti-spirituality or at least anti-awe of Nature

Approaching Potential Team Members

An appropriate family member—parent, sibling—should interview each potential team member before inviting them to join the effort. Begin with a brief statement of your concern: "I'm worried about John. What do you think?" Do not reveal too much too soon. Listen to what the person has to say. If the person seems in any way concerned, ask for confidentiality: "Would you be willing to promise that the rest of this conversation will be kept between us? I don't want anything said to John (the cult member) or to *anyone* who might undermine our efforts. If you think you might want to tell someone, please check with me first."

A common mistake is to overwhelm the person with information. This approach could cause someone to overreact and contact the cult member, which would drive the cult member deeper into the cult by undermining trust in the family.

To help people prepare, ask a hypothetical question: "If John asks whether you have been in touch with us, what do you think you would say?" Then rehearse a logical response with the person: "Yes, I spoke with them briefly on the phone. They wondered if I had heard from you. They expressed their love for you." This answer is true, but avoids specifics.

Don't rule out individuals because they seem busy or disinterested. Seek out pre-cult friends of your loved one, even if they haven't talked in years. If a friend is alienated from the cult member, remind him that it could be the person's cult identity, not their authentic self, which has created a rift. I have handled cases where an old friend was willing to be trained and to visit the member at the cult, thereby demonstrating open-mindedness and a commitment to the friendship.

When evaluating potential team members, some issues to keep in mind:

- Who does the cult member trust?

- Who is most respected?
- Who communicates best?
- Who is closest in age and interests?

Not everyone will agree to help. If the person says, “I have a divided allegiance,” or “I don’t want to do or say anything behind his back," respect his point of view. You might respond, "We understand. Think about it. If you ever change your mind and want to talk, please give us a call.” Even when the person is not comfortable making a commitment, the rest of the conversation should be spent gathering information and building rapport and trust. For example, you might ask:

- What do you know of our loved one’s involvement?
- What are your special concerns?
- What kinds of things have you tried to say?
- I admire your friendship. I’m glad you have that connection.
- Please stay in touch. We really want to help him. You are a link to that.

On the other hand, if the person says, “Oh, he has really changed. I’m upset about it,” or “I’ve heard all of these terrible things about the group,” then you are ready to move to the next level. Once the person has made a commitment, you can begin giving them information about the cult and destructive influence. Your next goal will be to help Team members educate themselves and look at all the issues—as you have done—so they will be prepared to interact with the cult member.

SUMMARY:

It may seem that the cult has a great advantage in terms of money and manpower, but your loved one is of special importance to you. The cult leaders will not care about the person the way you do.

An SIA Team, once set in motion, can quickly evolve. With education and encouragement, individuals may become effective members of the Team. Guidance from a skilled consultant from Freedom of Mind is

encouraged for best results.

Errant beliefs

- ***"THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS MIND CONTROL."*** **–**People who reject out of hand the existence of destructive influence usually have distorted conceptions about its techniques.
- ***"EVERYTHING IS MIND CONTROL."*** **–**One way is to think in terms of a continuum of influence: at one end, respectful, ethical, growth-enhancing influence that recognizes the value of individuality, human rights, and creativity; at the other end, conformity, dependency, and slavery, where all authority lies with the leader and the group.
- ***"WHY SHOULD I DO ANYTHING? HE SAYS HE'S HAPPY!"*** –Even if a cult member says that he is happy be aware that in a cult, happiness is often redefined as sacrifice or suffering.
- ***"HE'S AN ADULT. WE HAVE NO RIGHT TO INTERFERE."*** –Under hypnosis, a person can be age-regressed to childhood. The individual thinks, feels, and acts like a child. Once the cult member has an opportunity to learn about and recognize the features of destructive cults, and meet with former members and critics, he will be in a position to make an informed choice.
- ***"HE HAS THE RIGHT TO BELIEVE WHAT HE WANTS TO BELIEVE."*** –When people in a controlled environment are subjected to psychosocial influences–like group conformity or behavior modification techniques–they can be manipulated into accepting a completely different belief system.
- ***"HE'S TOO INTELLIGENT TO JOIN A CULT."*** –Many people have a hard time believing that bright, talented people—often educated, from good homes—could fall under the control of a cult.
- ***"HE MUST BE WEAK, OR LOOKING FOR EASY ANSWERS. HE NEEDS SOMEONE TO TELL HIM WHAT TO DO."*** –This is a very commonly held, but fallacious, generalization about cult members.
- ***"SHE'S BETTER OFF WHERE SHE IS."*** –A cult may provide

temporary shelter from traumatic circumstances, but cult involvement doesn't cure anyone's problems. It substitutes unethical practices for legitimate help.

- ***"HE'LL LEAVE ON HIS OWN WHEN HE IS READY."*** –This attitude presumes that the cult member has the resources and ability to leave.
- ***"WE'VE LOST HOPE."*** –Negative beliefs can become self-fulfilling. Many loved ones will inevitably leave the cult.

Who should be on the Team? The core will usually consist of immediate family members and close friends.

Stay alert to attitudes that can enhance success and attitudes that can undermine success.

Chapter 6

Empowering Members of the Team

During many years of counseling work, I have seen a wide range of family situations—from the most loving to the most destructive—torn apart by violence, alcoholism and emotional abuse. By far, most of my clients are families that fall in the caring and functional end of the spectrum. Families with overwhelming problems usually do not have the resources to try to help, though individual family members may make an effort. I was once contacted by a sister of a cult member whose other siblings were in jail, alcoholic, and who herself had a debilitating nerve disease. Despite the problems, she still tried to help the person in the cult.

I have yet to see a "perfect" family. Every family has emotional baggage, issues, and perhaps even a skeleton or two in its history. It comes with being human. Mom was too involved and intrusive, dad was too distracted and distant, or vice versa. Maybe there was illness, divorce, premature death, trauma, or an abrupt relocation. No matter what the problems were, family members who care and want to help *can* help.

Cult involvement has a dramatic impact on everyone, not just the person in the group. The Strategic Interactive Approach assumes a family systems approach. Even though the cult member is the reason the family goes for counseling (what family therapists call the *identified client*), we discover that everyone has issues. In a blended family, there is often anger and resentment between ex-wives and ex-husbands and their children–issues that play an important role.

In the SIA, we help each person take care of his own issues and concerns first. Why is this so important? It might sound trite, but it is true: we cannot really help others until we help ourselves. Family and friends see the cult member as someone who is 'stuck' but often don't realize that they too might be "stuck."

Families often unwittingly contribute to the loved one's susceptibility to cult manipulation. The classic example is that of a rigid, controlling parental figure–usually, but not always a father. Such a person typifies the prototypical cult leader—dictatorial and arrogant, controlling, using guilt and fear to promote dependency. Ironically, the child may be attracted to the cult leader because the leader seems so different from the parents, when in fact the leader has similar patterns and is much worse.

Sometimes a significant event precedes the cult recruitment. In one Moonie case, her mother had suffered a nervous breakdown before the young woman's recruitment into the cult. Her father was overwhelmed by the stress of what had happened to his wife and the burden of taking care of three children. One night, the young woman was raped. She went to her father for help, but he became angry with his daughter, denied the rape had occurred, and accused his daughter of making it up to get attention. The trauma, plus her mother's nervous breakdown and her father's rejection of her plea for help, made her vulnerable to recruiters. Although this is an extreme example, it demonstrates the need to understand and resolve underlying issues. There was no way I could discuss what is wrong with the Moon cult until the pain of her pre-cult self was acknowledged.

Cult members may point to the family's shortcomings, asking a parent, "Why should I talk with a therapist? You've never dealt with your drinking problem." In such situations, family members would do well to admit that there are problems and try to overcome them. This not only builds rapport, but also shows the cult members that it is possible to change. In fact, *modeling*—leading by example—is a key feature of the SIA.

Change tends to follow a pattern:

1. At first, the person may not realize there is a problem.
2. At a later point, they realize that they are stuck.
3. They search for additional resources and information.
4. They gain a new perspective.
5. They become unstuck by receiving help and following a new course of action.

There are countless issues that can stand in the way of progress. When each Team member addresses his own problems, he empowers himself and the Team, and sets an example for the cult member. Remember, our overall goal is growth and change for everyone–not just for the cult member.

DEALING WITH UNDERLYING ISSUES

Self-esteem

Even highly–accomplished people may be unable to feel good about

themselves. Their self-esteem is weighed down by negative inner voices that attack and judge them. In some people, these negative thoughts can cause panic and anxiety.

Learning which responses to stress have been unhealthy gives us the ability to correct them. Issues of low self-esteem or chronic depression of any Team member must be addressed while we are dealing with the cult situation. The condition of each person on the Strategic Interactive Team is important.

I try to help my clients recognize the parts of themselves that are critical and judgmental. Blame or self-recrimination drain people's resources. There is often a division between personal and professional resources in the same person. For example, a mother who had high self-esteem as a doctor and professor complained that she felt that she could help everyone else's children but her own. I asked her, "What advice would you give if your daughter were your neighbor's child?" Taking this perspective, her resources as a doctor and scholar were available to her as a mother. Likewise, a father who has high self-esteem as a successful businessman can learn to transfer some of his professional skills to his personal life.

Once we have removed roadblocks, members of the Team can tap into those skills and talents that help them feel good about themselves.

Making a self-assessment

On a sheet of paper, list your strengths in each of the following categories. Use descriptive language and be specific. Describe carefully how these strengths will help you reach your goals during the Strategic Interaction.

- Physical appearance
- Personality traits
- How other people see you
- How you relate to others
- Work performance
- Personal performance
- Mental functioning

- Sexuality

Once you have done this, think about how you can enhance your self-image. Identify characteristics that are blocking you, or missing qualities which you need to move forward. Visualize yourself feeling and being exactly the way you want to be.

Personality differences

Human beings tend to take their *maps of reality*—perceptions of the world—and project them onto everyone else. We assume that others think, feel, and respond the same way that we do. Obviously, this is not true. There are fundamental personality differences between individuals.

One way to cultivate self-awareness and self-knowledge about personality differences among family members is personality tests. These can help families gain greater knowledge of themselves, their brothers, sisters, parents, children, spouses, lovers, and friends, and help to understand why our loved ones behave as they do.

The widely–respected Myers-Briggs Personality Type Inventory can be quite helpful to assist individuals and family members to understand how each person differently experiences "reality." The foundation is online at http://www.myersbriggs.org. They have partnered with the non-profit Center for Applications of Personality Types to offer the instrument online.[44]

The resulting self-awareness may be used to create a bridge between the cult member and the family. You might say, "Dad is this type, and Mom is that type. We're curious to see what type you are." When the time comes, families can ask their loved one to complete the test not just once, but twice: first, as they would before they got involved with the cult and, second, the way they presently feel. Of course, results will vary depending on the cult member's frame of mind while taking the test but, in general, it may reveal the cult member's personality type has changed. The more you understand about your loved one's view of his pre-cult identity, the better you will be able to recognize the cult identity—and the more easily you can engage his authentic identity.

This strategy worked particularly well in the case of a woman who was involved with a Bible cult. When her husband called me, he was at his wit's end. Although he considered himself a Christian, his wife was frightening and alienating their children by telling them things like, "Daddy's going to

hell." As a way of building bridges, I encouraged him to prepare for an intervention by getting in touch with his wife's family who, it turned out, knew very little about the group.

I learned that the cult member's brother, a devout Christian who knew the Bible well, had tried to debate theological issues with his sister but had gotten nowhere. Another of her brothers, I learned, was a psychologist. I recommended that he read Yeakley's *The Discipling Dilemma*, which used the Myers-Briggs Test to measure radical personality change in members of another Bible cult. In addition, I asked him to read Keirsey's first book, *Please Understand Me*[45] and have each member of the family read the book and complete a personality test. He also sent a copy of the book to his sister who was in the cult and asked her to do a personality test as part of the family counseling–so that family members could discuss the results and, hopefully, understand one another better.

Using the family's experience with *Please Understand Me*, he then introduced Yeakley's book to his sister, and began a dialogue with her. The brother, who was well-versed in Christian doctrine, was able to point out differences between legitimate groups and Bible cults. This laid the foundation for a meeting between the cult member and a former member of her group. In the end, she chose to leave the cult and return to her family. She has since appeared on national television to speak out about her experience.

To Do

- Have Interactive Team members complete a personality test
- Discuss the results with each other
- When deemed appropriate, you may show and discuss results with your loved one in the cult and ask him to participate

Values and beliefs

People's beliefs often have little or nothing to do with physical reality. Instead, they are influenced by parental, cultural and peer expectations, by personality type, as well as by the need to feel loved, protected and accepted. Values and beliefs can change rapidly in response to changes in our role or status. For example, union workers who rise to the

level of management tend to shift to new patterns because they need to belong to their new peer group. Similarly, your loved one has adopted cult-generated values and beliefs—perhaps about reincarnation or extraterrestrials that inhabit his body—a way of gaining acceptance by the group. This concept will be important to remember when you communicate with him.

The team needs to be aware of—and resist—the temptation to think in terms of *should* and *should not*. A *should* is a moral imperative: For example, "I *should* have been a better parent." If we do not live up to what we *should* or *should not* be doing, we may judge ourselves to be bad or unworthy as human beings. *Shoulds* are built on generalizations and absolutes, and tend to promote simplistic, oppositional thinking. They pollute language and communication. For every word like generous, diligent, intelligent, strong, or honest, there is a negative opposite: selfish, lazy, stupid, weak, deceitful. People may assume they are either one or the other. This truth is usually somewhere in between.

By discovering or reviewing your *shoulds*, you will gain greater insight into your values and beliefs. You will be able to express more effectively your concerns. If you can stop telling yourself you *should* be this or you *should not* do that, you may avoid telling your loved one what he should or should not do.

Values and beliefs assessment

- Are your beliefs open to change?
- Do you allow for exceptions when circumstances warrant them?
- How do you feel when you make a mistake?
- Where do your values come from (parents, education, culture)?
- Do your values fit your own unique circumstances, personality, and needs?
- Do you test and evaluate your values and beliefs?
- Do you accept what others tell you at face value?
- Do your values lead you to positive action and behavior?
- Are your values realistic?
- Are your values life-enhancing, nourishing, and supportive?
- Do you ever find your values are life-restricting?

- Do you acknowledge your needs and feelings?
- What happens when you notice areas of guilt, conflict, obligation, or avoidance?

To Do

- Have Interactive Team members fill out the Values and Beliefs Assessment
- Discuss the results with each other
- Seek professional advice on how to use the results with the cult member

Sibling issues

Siblings are in a difficult position when their brother or sister joins a cult. Often they become jealous and resentful of the attention given the cult member. They might ask a parent, "How come you only think about John? He is in the cult giving away his trust fund. I'm working really hard, doing everything right, and you only pay attention to me when you want to hear about John!"

Some people use a third party to get a message across, instead of communicating directly. This is called *triangulation* and it is a dysfunctional way to communicate. Parents can put one of their children in the role of *switchboard* to communicate with each other or to get messages to other family members. For example:

Younger sister: *My parents are always arguing over what they should do about John. They put me in the middle. Do I agree with Mom or do I agree with Dad? They want me to say whose fault it is. They also put me in the middle asking me to talk with my brother. Sometimes, I'm very angry. Most of the time, I feel frustrated and depressed. It's bad enough that my relationship with my brother is messed up. I don't need my parents always on my case about it.*

This type of indirect communication is usually ineffective, and can be downright harmful. The solution is for the person in the middle to refuse to convey messages. She should say, "Tell him yourself, don't put me in the middle!"

Another issue comes when one of the siblings has, himself, left a cult involvement. If the sibling was in the same group, that person is looked

upon as a traitor by the cult member. This person will probably be a key person in the rescue effort. It is imperative that the ex-member obtain good counseling. They need to understand, and be able to articulate, the key issues involved in destructive influence. If the sibling was in a different cult group, they usually have more flexibility and freedom to talk openly to the cult member about their experience, since they aren't seen as a traitor.

Addictions

One of the most difficult tasks facing some family members is admitting to drug abuse or addiction. If a potential Team member has a problem with drugs or alcohol, the family can have a mini-interaction with that person. Indeed, there are drug and alcohol interventions that are similar to cult interventions.

You might enlist the cult member in helping the addicted one. One family I worked with had a daughter in a New Age cult. During the two-day preparation meeting, it came to light that the father was an alcoholic. Fortunately, he admitted he needed professional help. I suggested that the mother ask the daughter to come home for an alcoholism intervention, the aim of which would be to get him into a treatment center.

I arranged to have a local family therapist set up the intervention. The daughter came home and participated in a preparatory meeting with the therapist. Family members, who were coached beforehand, pointed out specific things that he had or had not done, such as breaking a promise to spend time with the family on Easter, or losing days of work and forcing the mother to cover for him. The cult member loved her father and really made an effort to participate. He agreed to go for treatment, and the powerful emotional bonding between family members made her feel respected and needed.

A couple of months later, when her father was out of the facility and sober, we did a successful intervention with her. This time, the father took the lead. He was able to be a role model for change. He told his daughter, "You confronted me with my problem. I listened and I went for therapy. Thank you for giving me so much support. Now I need to let you know some of my concerns with your current situation. Please hear us out." This created reciprocity, and made it easier to approach the cult member.

Religious issues

Most people don't want to believe that they are closed-minded. If you are a parent who is concerned that your son or daughter isn't thinking independently, it will be essential to cultivate and demonstrate open-mindedness. This may be especially difficult when it comes to religious issues. For example, if you are a conservative Christian and your loved one is in a cult that teaches against the concept of the Trinity, you may run into a major stumbling block. Each side may try to force their view on the other. It is difficult to feel anything but defensive when one of your central religious beliefs is being attacked.

In most Bible-based cults, although the member is aggressively taught doctrine, it is not the doctrine that holds them in the group. It is the sense that they are God's true people. To engage the cult member in a Biblical argument or discussion is often futile. They perceive you as being led by Satan (at worst) or ignorant (at best).[46]

When people get stuck in a particular point of view, I recommend a communication technique called *counter-attitudinal argumentation*. Each side is given a structured amount of time, say 10 minutes, to defend the other person's point of view as if it were his own. For example, the loved one who doesn't believe in the Trinity argues why he believes in the Trinity. The parent who believes in the Trinity presents all of the arguments against the Trinity, as if he believes that point of view.

Typically, neither side is able to verbalize all of the points properly or convincingly when this exercise is first performed. After all, they don't really understand, let alone believe, the opposing point of view. The beauty of the technique is that it is up to each person to teach the other how to think like them. If this exercise is done by both parties with mutual respect and a desire to improve the relationship, the results can be amazing. The goal here is not to make the other person accept your point of view—it is to step into another person's model of reality and look at things from that view. If you think the cult member is rigid and stuck, then make sure that you aren't acting the same.

Team members who are humanistic, agnostic, or atheistic in their philosophical orientation may have particular difficulty if their loved one is in a religious group. Problems result when a cult member tries to recruit them with religious dogma. Typically, atheists wind up putting down all religion, and may dig themselves into a hole in terms of communicating with the loved one.

I recommend these people adopt a more resourceful philosophy. For example, they might say, "If I did believe in a God, it would be a God of

truth and not a God of lies. Otherwise, how could you trust him?" Although most members believe in a God of truth, some cults attempt to use passages from the Bible to prove that God deceives us, or approves of deception. In such cases, you would do well to study these verses. You might contact a pastor or rabbi for help.

Another resourceful approach is, "If I did believe in the Bible as the inerrant word of God, as you do, then I would want to learn everything about it–and not rely on rote memorization of selected passages." By taking this posture, you are encouraging the cult member to question cult sources of information.

Team members might consider taking the stance that, if there is a God, then He (She) would be a God of love–a Being who has love for all people, even those who don't believe in Him. Those who believe in such a God would display such love. A famous description of unconditional love can be found in the New Testament (1 Corinthians 13: 4-13).

"Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends; as for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up my childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood. So faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love."[47]

If a Team member has trouble relating to a specific religion, he might take the time to learn about a variety of faiths. A good starting place is Jeffrey Moses's book *Oneness: Great Principles Shared By All Religions*, [48] which points out common beliefs such as *Love Thy Neighbor, Speak Truth*, and *The Golden Rule*. Another good book/ audiotape series is Huston Smith's *The World's Religions*.[49]

Stress, panic, and anxiety management

Some family members develop a form of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in response to their loved one's cult involvement. Parents visualize

their child committing suicide, even when the cult has no history of that kind of behavior. When people have intrusive and negative thoughts, they can become immobilized. Cults produce doubt, uncertainty, and fear. Knowledge and information are your greatest assets.

Mother: *I watch television and see images of bodies at the People's Temple, or Waco, or Heaven's Gate. I can still see the lifeless bodies under those creepy purple shrouds. Those young men and women were somebody's sons and daughters. My son is into meditation and computers. I haven't been able to sleep. I'm paralyzed with fear and worry.*

To this mother, I would say, "Let's find out what needs to change in order for you to sleep—*before* we talk about what you can do to help your son."

Panicking or anxious, the brain selects the emergency (fight-or-flight) response because it does not have enough information or it has been misinformed. The perception of danger activates the autonomic nervous system, which has two branches: the sympathetic and the parasympathetic nervous system. The sympathetic nervous system prepares the body for action by releasing adrenaline and noradrenaline into the bloodstream. The parasympathetic nervous system is responsible for restoring the body to relaxation. When panic strikes, the sympathetic nervous system takes charge.

Being able to slowly and objectively size up a situation is crucial. We observe. We take a curious, yet concerned, attitude. We gather information in a relaxed, thoughtful manner, but we do not rush in to fix the problem. Using the information we've gathered, we determine what action to take.

Some fears are valid, but none need to be blown out of proportion. The best response is to have a plan, or multiple plans, to prepare for unforeseen contingencies. There are many techniques that can help you gain control over a given situation.

THERAPEUTIC CONTROL TECHNIQUES

Cults use deceptive techniques to create damaged, dependent personalities. The SIA teaches therapeutic techniques that encourage autonomy and healthy self-esteem. Team members can prevent panic attacks by interrupting the panic cycle at the point where their brain interprets the stimulus, thereby preventing the sympathetic nervous system from triggering a fight-or-flight response. There are exercises that can be used to

break unhealthy thought patterns and curb anxiety by intervening *before* the sympathetic nervous system is activated.

Overcoming distorted thought patterns

A technique called cognitive-behavioral therapy offers concrete tools for identifying and correcting dysfunctional thought patterns. David Burns' book, *Feeling Good–The New Mood Therapy*[50] is a great resource for identifying and challenging problematic thought patterns. Recognizing such thought patterns in yourself will also give you insight into your loved one's psychological state, since cults actively instill distorted thinking. One of your aims will be to get the cult member to correct such destructive habits. Here are some examples of patterns to overcome:

***Overemphasis on the past*:** Ignores the possibility that things can ever change in the present or future. Father: He never listened to my advice when he was young. It won't work now either.

Over-generalization: Formulating a universal rule from one isolated event. Brother: Last week, we had a fight on the telephone. He hates me. He's always hated me.

Global labeling/toxic put-downs: Friend to cult member: You sound like a brainwashed robot.

Self-blame: Inappropriate or exaggerated guilt over past events. Father: The divorce was pretty rough. It's all my fault that he's in the cult.

Denial: Complete avoidance of the existence of a problem. Mother: He's not really under the cult's control. He's just confused.

Rationalization: Creating excuses. Sister: She's better off where she is. If she weren't in the cult, she'd be out on the street doing drugs.

Filtering*:* Selectively paying attention to the negative and disregarding the positive. Mother: I spent all day with him and had a wonderful time, but he went back to the cult. I feel like a complete failure.

Polarized thinking*:* Black-and-white categories, with no middle ground. Father: He's wasting his life in that cult, working so hard with nothing to show for it.

Personalization*:* Assuming everything has to do with you. Mother: I left three messages for him this morning and he hasn't called back. He must know I'm in touch with a cult expert.

Mind–reading*:* Making presumptions about what others are thinking. Sister: I know you're upset with me for not telling you first.

Control fallacies*:* Assuming that you have total control or you are a victim. Father: I just want to go in and snatch him, sit him down, and snap him out of it. Mother: Nothing I do has any effect at all.

Emotional reasoning*:* Assuming things are the way you feel. Brother: I feel that anyone willing to believe that crap is just weak.

Thought-Stopping

1. Identify automatic negative thinking: write down on a piece of paper your 10 most frequently recurring negative thoughts. For example: *He will never get out of the cult*.

2. Ask yourself: What thoughts would I like to have instead? Write them down next to the negative thoughts. Example: *He will get out of the cult! It is only a matter of how fast and how easy it will be for him to leave.*

3. Think about the most common circumstances that trigger a negative thought; write them down. Example: *When I go into his room, or look at his picture*.

4. Visualize being in one of those circumstances, but this time, you interrupt the negative thought and replace it with the positive thought.

   a. Rehearse saying the new, constructive thought again and again.

   b. Another method to encourage positive thoughts and feelings is to write messages to yourself and put them on your refrigerator, on your bathroom mirror, in your car. Some examples are:

      - *Blessed are we who can laugh at ourselves, for we shall never cease to be amused.*
      - The Serenity Prayer: *God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.*
      - *Life is a journey, not a destination.*
      - *Be more compassionate towards yourself.*

- *Friendship is founded on trust and love. Trust that you are loved.*
- *Gratitude is a great attitude!*
- *Energy follows thought.*
- *Think good thoughts.*
- *It's never too late to have a happy childhood.*

Visualization

There are many visualization techniques mentioned throughout this book. Try this simple one to help you feel more confident and successful.

Step 1: See yourself from an outside perspective, as if you were on television–happy, confident, standing tall, doing whatever needs to be done.

Step 2: Now, visualize yourself stepping into that picture, becoming that happy, confident, productive person. Imagine your loved one out of the cult, happy and fulfilled. Visualize in color, in focus, and with as much detail as you can.

Self-hypnosis

Dr. Brian Alman has written a book called *Self-Hypnosis: The Complete Manual for Health and Self-Change.*[51] I first learned self-hypnosis in 1980 in order to improve my free throws in basketball. I learned to focus my mind, ignore the outside environment–people, noises–and my own thoughts about missing the shot, and focus on being in my body and seeing the ball go through the hoop. I later learned how to use self-hypnosis to help quiet my mind when I needed to fall asleep, and began to use it as a creative strategy when I needed to write.

If you have trouble learning self-hypnosis from a book, go to a certified hypnotherapist. Don't go to just anyone who advertises their services. The American Society for Clinical Hypnosis (ASCH) as well as The International Society of Hypnosis (ISH) require that their members have professional credentials and proper training and that they operate within ethical guidelines. I have been teaching workshops for both organizations for many years and find their members quickly able to grasp cult tactics due to their training.

Deep muscle relaxation

Muscle tension is a major component of anxiety and panic attacks. Learn to pay attention to muscle tension in specific areas of your body and consciously release that tension. This is called *progressive muscle relaxation*. Start by tensing the muscles in your feet, and then relaxing them. Repeat this over and over until your feet feel completely relaxed—then move on to your ankles, calves, thighs, and so on until your whole body is relaxed. (Of course, nothing beats a deep, relaxing, professional massage.) You can also combine two techniques. For example, you can try a visualization technique, in addition to progressive muscle work, to attain deep muscle relaxation. Close your eyes and imagine a beam of sunlight shining on the tense area. Focus on relaxing those muscles.

Deep breathing techniques

Breathing is one of those activities that we take for granted. Several times a day, take a series of long, deep breaths. This brings oxygen into your body and expels waste products like carbon monoxide. Exhale slowly, deeply, and deliberately, and make your exhalation last longer than your inhalation. Try to exhale completely. Sometimes it helps to vocalize your exhalation, as if you were letting out a sigh of relief. Once you have completely emptied your lungs, they will naturally refill themselves, making the inhalation easier and more therapeutic.

Meditation

When used as a form of relaxation training, meditation focuses our minds and allows us to step away from the stresses in our lives. It quiets and disciplines the mind by focusing on a single item at a specific point in time. Reflective meditation gives a person the opportunity to learn about his fears, problems, and concerns, instead of being consumed by them. There are hundreds of different ways to meditate.[52] I personally like to just sit and focus on my breathing. When I am very agitated, I find it helpful to count in my head–inhale, *one, two, three, four*, exhale, *one, two three, four*.

In a basic meditation session, I suggest that you:

- Focus on being aware.
- If you have a thought, let it come in and drift away.

- Realize that you are more than your thoughts, more than your feelings, more than your body.
- Feel connected to all living things—and God, if you are a believer.

Another form of meditation for families with deep Biblical convictions is to focus upon a particular passage of Scripture, and reflect thoughtfully on its meaning and application for one's life of faith. Some examples are: *Joshua 1:8; Psalm 119:11, 15, 48, 97-99; Psalm 143:5; I Timothy 4:13-15*.

Prayer

If you believe in God, prayer is one of the most powerful tools for empowerment. Team members who have deep religious convictions draw great strength from regular prayer. Some clients ask their entire congregation, church, temple, or community to pray for their loved one. My mother told me she prayed for a year, asking God to let me have an accident and break my leg so they could rescue me from the Moonies. (In fact, I had an accident due to sleep deprivation and I did break my leg, which led to an intervention.)

I personally recommend positive, open-ended prayers which petition God to give strength, wisdom and resources to all those in need. Don't just think about your own needs. Pray for everyone. If you don't believe in God or a Higher Power, then just take some time to intentionally and meaningfully wish everyone well and hope for a positive change to occur.

MODELING POSITIVE CHANGE

The most powerful way to influence a person is to be an effective role model. If you want to encourage someone to grow and change, become a model of growth and change.

When parents have an unhealthy, abusive relationship with one another, the cult member might challenge them: "Look at your life. How dare you say that my leader is abusive?" If these parents want to influence their son or daughter, they should start making changes in their relationship. They must *model* those changes first. Then, they will have greater leverage to be taken seriously.

If the mother has problems speaking her mind to her domineering husband, she should learn to assert herself—particularly in front of the cult member. By doing so, she will be modeling the concept of standing up to an authority figure. The cult member will see that Mom can change; she can

stand up for herself. That is a behavior we want to encourage in the cult member.

Each member of the Strategic Interactive Team must be a role model. Particularly during interactions with the cult member, Team members should ask themselves, *Am I demonstrating that I am interested in improving my life? Making the world a better place? Am I showing that I am open and want to learn?*

If you want your loved one to believe the world is not an evil place, that there are plenty of constructive, worthwhile, and exciting things to do, then do some of those things yourself. Tell your loved one about your experiences. Remember, living fully and well is its own reward. Find things that energize you and make you feel good. Approach each night of sleep with gratitude for the opportunity to be alive, and look forward to the new day.

SUMMARY:

Empower Team members! When each Team member addresses his own problems, he empowers himself and the Team, and sets an example for the cult member. Remember, our overall goal is growth and change for everyone–not just for the cult member.

Dealing with the underlying issues each family member brings to the interactions among the family can help clarify paths to reach out to the cult member. A good place to start is a self–assessment:

- Values and beliefs
- Sibling issues
- Addiction
- Religious beliefs
- Anxiety and stress control

If you want your loved one to believe the world is not an evil place, and that there are plenty of constructive, worthwhile, and exciting things to do, then do some of those things yourself. Tell your loved one about your experiences.

Chapter 7

Understanding Cult/Person's Beliefs and Tactics

To truly connect with the impacted person, you must understand who is influencing him. If it is a group, both its doctrine–*what* its members believe–and its tactics—*how* it makes them believe are important. In this chapter, you will learn many ways you can locate, evaluate, and utilize information about the "Agent of Negative Influence." Like a detective, you will conduct research, look for clues, ask questions, and follow leads until you know your subject. The more you learn, the more effective and confident you will be.

Deborah Reichmann and the Twelve Tribes[53]

When Marjorie and Michael Reichmann were told by their 22-year-old daughter, Deborah, that she intended to join a group called the Twelve Tribes Messianic Communities, in Harrisonburg, Virginia, they knew nothing about the group and were generally unfamiliar with the nature of destructive groups. If the group was destructive, they naively believed, their college–educated daughter would see that and leave.

However, the Reichmanns immediately began educating themselves about the Twelve Tribes. In 1995, before the Internet was widely available, they gained their first insights through discussions with several pastors in the Harrisonburg area. Ultimately, they were referred to my first book, and to Bob and Judy Pardon.

Bob Pardon is a minister and friend who, with Judy, operates the MeadowHaven Retreat for former cult members (meadowhaven.org) near Cape Cod. I have worked with Bob for many years on numerous cases, and have the greatest respect for his integrity, compassion, and deep commitment. Bob has a great deal of Biblical knowledge and has studied Greek, which has proved invaluable in counseling members of Bible–based groups. After two years investigating the Twelve Tribes—interviewing members and observing the group's behavior—Bob and Judy had amassed a tremendous amount of information, some of which can be found on their NEIRR.org website.

Bob and Judy helped the Reichmanns to understand the group's beliefs–for example, that women should not wear makeup. They shared details about its deceptive practices, such as the fact that the cult is not run

by elders, but by Elbert Eugene Spriggs, a former personnel manager for the Dixie Yarn Company who renamed himself Yoneq.[54] Bob and Judy put the Reichmanns in touch with former members who had been involved for many years in the group's top leadership. Once they were convinced that the group was a cult, the Reichmanns decided to meet with me to plan an intervention.

During the two-day preparation, we discovered that Deborah's sister and brother-in-law had been approached by neighbors who were members of the International Churches of Christ (ICC), a cult sect that was founded by Kip McKean. The family had knocked on their door and invited them to a *Bring Your Neighbor Day* event and home Bible study. The brother-in-law was impressed by their enthusiasm, though his wife thought they were pushy. It had never struck either one of them that this typical suburban family was part of a cult. After watching videotapes of the ICC and explaining its practices, Bob, Judy and I encouraged them to share with Deborah what they had learned about ICC–how McKean claimed that his group was the one and only truly Christian group on earth, and the only one whose Baptism was accepted by God–and help her see parallels with the Twelve Tribes.

The Reichmanns had been encouraged by Bob and Judy, and later myself, to maintain good communication with their daughter. They applied the communication strategies and techniques mentioned in this book. During his visits to the commune, Michael joined members in preparing meals, washing dishes, singing and dancing. He earned the cult members' trust, and was able to get a firsthand understanding of the group's beliefs and practices. He and Marjorie invited members of the cult to visit them in their home in the Midwest, which they did–further convincing the group leaders that the family was safe. Because of all their preparatory work, it was much easier for Deborah to be given permission to return home for a visit and, ultimately, for our meeting.

When Deborah arrived home, the Reichmanns told her that they had met some people who were knowledgeable about the Twelve Tribes. They asked whether she would be willing to meet with us and consider another point of view. Deborah was so confident that the group was *of God*, and so eager to allay her family's concerns, that she agreed. Bob, Judy and a former 20-year Twelve Tribes veteran–JoEllen Griffin, who had almost died while in the group due to lack of medical care–were there with me.[55] The family asked Deborah to spend a few days of uninterrupted time with us. If at the end of that time she still wanted to return to the Twelve Tribes, they would

not to stand in her way. It took only a few days. Deborah decided to leave the group.

GATHERING INFORMATION

In order to communicate with the cult member and earn his trust, Team members must learn as much as possible about the cult's doctrine, and compare it to those of other groups, both healthy and destructive. It helps to identify specific ways that the cult deceives members and keeps them dependent—whether by distorting the truth, misinterpreting religious texts, or deliberately spreading lies about its critics.

The Internet

Given the nature of the Internet, you'll find sites that defend your loved one's cult as well as sites that are critical. There are always two or more sides to an issue, so don't accept any information at face value. Instead, be willing to hear all sides of the story. Take the time to explore both pro and counter–cult sites. Then you can develop your own, informed opinions.

You might want to protect your identity when sending email or posting to a cult-related newsgroup. Keep in mind that cults have savvy Internet users who monitor websites, social networks, and email lists.[56]

If your loved one visits you at home, protect the files, email, Internet bookmarks and history on your own computer. I met with one family who ran into trouble because the cult member searched his father's computer (without permission) and found a history of emails with me, tipping him off to a planned intervention. Another adult child guessed her mother's password and the result was disastrous. Each time you use your computer, be sure to remove all traces of cult-related information. Delete any email that might arouse suspicion, and keep critical documents in a backup file. Passwords and encryption can be used to prevent unauthorized access to your computer.

Cult literature

Find out if the group has a written code of ethics and, if so, does it hold its leaders to those principles? Does the cult's behavior contradict its teachings? Do leaders give orders to lie? By reading cult literature, you will develop a reference point for identifying and understanding the group's deceptive practices.

For example, if your loved one is in a Bible cult, you can determine whether the leaders are misquoting or misrepresenting passages to delude their followers. If you're not comfortable or familiar with the Bible, get professional help. Seek out cult–generated literature to understand the group's interpretation. Visit the cult website and read its online literature. Although there are similarities among Bible cults, each group will have its own set of beliefs. While many benevolent religious groups provide guidance through one-on-one mentoring relationships, some Bible cults impose a one–*over*–one discipling relationship in which a superior makes decisions for the rank-and-file members.

If the person is in a Buddhist cult, I suggest that you read *The Path With Heart: A Guide Through the Perils and Promises of Spiritual Life* by Jack Kornfield.[57] Ask your loved one if he would be willing to read and discuss it. He might say, "Okay, if you read one of my books." As a trust-building step, offer to read his book first. To an outsider, cult books often seem bizarre, dense, or convoluted. Typically, the parents, relatives or friends can't get past the first chapter. If you have trouble, read one chapter. If you can't get through one chapter, read a section. Discuss what you read with your loved one as soon as you finish it.

Whenever you agree to read each other's material, the crucial part of that contract is that you will discuss it afterward. Instead of "Here, read this!" you can say, "Let's read this and discuss it together." This creates an opportunity for positive interaction. If you have questions about the material, write them down. Make notes for yourself. Discuss your thoughts with your loved one.

Always include a timeframe: "When will you read this next chapter? Will you have read it by next weekend when I call?" At the agreed-upon date, you can follow up by asking, "Did you enjoy the chapter?" If he says he didn't have time to read it, express your disappointment and ask for another commitment: "When do you think you will have it read?" Even if he continues to postpone the discussion, you will still be planting seeds of dissonance. Eventually, he might realize, "Why can't I do what I promised?" He has discovered something about himself. His broken promises might bring you closer to your goal.

Parents, siblings, relatives, friends, and co-workers may also have problems keeping promises. When you break a promise made to a cult member, you lose his trust. Demonstrate that you are making an effort. Set goals and follow through. Don't allow yourself to be sidetracked. Follow through!

Former members

Talking with former cult members is one of the best ways to understand cult beliefs and destructive influence.[58] Ex-members will often be the most reliable source of information, and may be willing to help you plan and carry out the Strategic Interaction. I suggest that you meet and interview at least a dozen former members: some from your loved one's cult, and some from other groups. Pay special attention to those who have received counseling and have digested and integrated their cult experience. Ask them hypothetical questions: "What would happen if we took this approach?" They are a valuable resource.

Network with other families

Find other families whose loved ones are in the same cult. Agree to protect each other's confidential information. By creating a network of concerned families, you offer each other emotional support and can share news about the group. You may even commit to helping others rescue their loved ones once your own is free.

Learn the loaded language

By talking with former members and other families, you will also have the opportunity to learn the clichés, doublespeak and coded jargon that the group uses to shut down critical thinking. Each group has its own buzzwords and platitudes. For example, Jehovah's Witnesses are forbidden to use the word *God*. If you want to gather information from a Jehovah's Witness, use the term *Jehovah*. In the Twelve Tribes, the word *Christian* is a great evil. They use the term *believer*. For me, *moon* would automatically trigger a picture of Sun Myung Moon instead of the celestial body that orbits the earth. Scientology has two dictionaries of L. Ron Hubbard's definitions of words. When a Scientologist doesn't understand or doesn't agree with a passage, he is instructed to look up words in the cult's dictionary. Members are indoctrinated to accept Hubbard's definitions as their own. Some cult members are so thoroughly conditioned that certain words can elicit an automatic psychological or physiological response.

If you don't know the loaded language or the triggers, you will need to learn them. When you use a term, watch how your loved one responds. Watch his face and body language. For example, if you say something and he becomes cultish—glassy-eyed, distant, rigid—ask yourself, "What did I say?" Cult jargon will often elicit the cult

identity. You may want to learn the jargon, but don't use it if you're trying to interact with the pre-cult self. The cult armor is designed to fend off attack. If you approach him with warmth and respect, your loved one will open up and talk with you. Also, pay attention to how your loved one and other cult members talk to one another. This information will help you to understand the cult identity and to communicate more effectively.

Keep in mind that families also can have their own code words. Buzzwords, like the term *respect*, should be discussed and, if necessary, rephrased. Each member of the Strategic Interactive Team should make a list of buzzwords. What are some trigger words in the family system? Families have their own armor that keeps them from being flexible and creative.

To Do

- Research the cult beliefs and practices
- Make a list of probable cult triggers
- Check your list with former members
- Make a list of loaded language words and phrases

Attend cult activities

Team members should not attend sessions or visit cult property before they are prepared. If the cult member invites you, you might say, "I'd prefer to talk to you alone." Generally, the cult member will talk to people who make an effort to listen. The first goal is to build rapport and trust–not to argue and prove points.

Once you've familiarized yourself with the group and its tactics, someone on the Team might attend a cult event or lecture. They can tell the cult member they want to learn more. This will build trust while you learn about the cult's behavior. Getting a few people to go together to a cult program can be effective, but they need to work as a team.

I don't recommend that family members or friends attend extended workshops or sessions. It's too risky. Despite the best of intentions, family and friends have been actually recruited. An alternative strategy is to ask the

leader or sub-leader to meet you at a restaurant for lunch. This will build trust, and it's a good way to gather information. Understand that they, too, have an agenda—to check you out and possibly recruit you. If family members say, "At first, we overreacted," or "We were influenced by the media," they will be perceived as non-threatening. Spend time getting to know cult members who are close to your loved one. The more you learn, the more tools you will have at your disposal.

DISTINGUISH INFORMATION FROM DISINFORMATION

You have to be able to distinguish between reliable and misleading information. Cults have been intertwined in the public eye with the issue of forcible deprogramming, partly due to a multi-million dollar public relations campaign financed by the major cults. In the propaganda campaign, cults portrayed deprogramming as a great threat to religious liberty. In cult lectures, booklets, and pamphlets and on websites, deprogrammers are portrayed as money-hungry thugs who tie their victims to chairs, beating and raping them until they recant their beliefs.[59]

Cult Awareness Network (not!)

The Cult Awareness Network (CAN), the largest grassroots organization for families with loved ones in cults, was falsely portrayed by the cults as a group of fascists who wanted to deprive people of religious freedom. In 1994, CAN lost one of scores of harassment lawsuits filed by cult members across the country, and the $1.875-million jury verdict drove the organization into bankruptcy. Ultimately, CAN's trade name, post office box number, help-line phone number, and service mark were sold at auction for $20,000 to Steven Hayes, a member of Scientology.[60]

CAN is now part of the problem. The wolf is wearing Grandma's clothes. If you call the CAN number today, most likely a cult member will answer. Any information offered by family members could be used against them in their efforts to liberate their loved one. The CAN Web site is cultawarenessnetwork.org. Many other websites also exist to bolster cult groups' agendas, to recruit and indoctrinate people around the world. These past years, it is big business for people to do "reputation management." Destructive people and groups with lots of money can do a lot to bury critical information on the Internet—making it hard for the average person to find it.

One of the most common disinformation tactics used by cults is the straw man, whereby a person misrepresents someone's arguments rather than addressing the real issues. For example, cults frequently create a false image of mind control as a mystical force that can overpower any person in any situation. Naturally, this all-or-nothing straw man is easier to knock over than the actual positions taken by informed professionals–namely, that destructive influence techniques vary widely in application and effectiveness, and that, while mind control is never absolute it can, nevertheless, have devastating consequences.

I question the motives of any individual or group that takes the position that *under no circumstances* can people be manipulated into adopting new beliefs. Whose interests are advanced by the notion that destructive influence is entirely implausible? If mind control is a hoax, why has professor and former American Psychological Association President Philip Zimbardo taught a course at Stanford University called "The Psychology of Mind Control" for over fifteen years?[61] Take a look at my interview with Dr. Zimbardo and it is worth watching it.[62]

Cult propagandists try to convince people that mind control is not recognized by mental health professionals. One can cite the DSM-IV, American Psychiatric Association's diagnostic manual[63] which specifically mentions cults and brainwashing under 300.15, "Dissociative Disorder NOS." Of course, you can also cite the favorable reviews of my book *Combatting Cult Mind Control* in *The Lancet* and *The American Journal of Psychiatry*.[64]

Another defensive tactic is to misquote legal decisions involving cults. When talking with your loved ones, ask them for the case, citation and, even better, the official ruling. When it comes to legal decisions, it is best to ask a lawyer familiar with cult-related litigation experience to help you get the documents to show and explain to the cult member.

Cult defenders

Disinformation is spread, as well, by cult defenders who cite religious freedom. Some high-profile researchers have accepted funds or other perks from the cults they were studying. For instance, the *Washington Post* reported that Aum Shinrikyo paid the airfare, lodging, and other expenses of four Americans who came to the defense of the cult when Japanese police

began investigating a poison gas attack on the Tokyo subway.[65] One of these Americans was J. Gordon Melton, who has a history of defending controversial groups such as Jim Jones' People's Temple. When questioned in 1988—10 years after the mass suicide of Jones's group—Melton said, "This wasn't a cult. This was a respectable, mainline Christian group."[66] In an issue of *Nova Religio*, Rutgers Professor and 30-year cult scholar Benjamin Zablocki exposed how cult funding creates bias in studies of controversial groups.[67]

Cult defenders confuse the public by promoting a primitive concept of mind control. One popular argument among cult defenders is that the testimony of former members, or "apostates," should not be considered reliable, because such people may have been prejudiced by their departure from the group. According to Melton, "hostile ex-members invariably shade the truth. They invariably blow out of proportion minor incidents and turn them into major incidents."[68] Ironically, cult defenders ignore the possibility that the testimony of cult members and leaders might also be partisan.

The demonization of cult critics

When *Combatting Cult Mind Control* was first published in 1988, I became one of the most visible targets of cult disinformation campaigns. Scientology has a "Dead Agent Pack" about me. This folder of material is designed to assassinate my character. I've been threatened with lawsuits and received death threats from cult members. Groups such as the Moonies tell their members I am Satan's agent. Specific phobias about me have been planted in members' minds. Cult members are indoctrinated to believe that Steven Hassan is a deprogrammer who endorses and associates with people who kidnap, beat, and torture members of new religions until they renounce their faith in God. Cult web sites portray me as an anti-religious bigot who is out to destroy religious freedom.

When a cult member raises such an accusation about any cult critic, I recommend that the family ask for proof: "Show us the evidence. Have your leaders documented the charges with names, dates, and places? Were any charges filed?" The leaders of the group do not want their accusations to be examined or challenged. Family members and friends should ask to speak with the individuals who purportedly wrote negative affidavits. The deprogramming phobia can be dismantled piece by piece, exposing the lies

and deception.

When evaluating any piece of information, ask yourself:

- What is the source of the criticism?
- How is the source funded?
- Who, exactly, is making the accusations?
- What are this person's verifiable credentials?
- What is his standing in the academic and scientific community?
- What is his training? His experience? His reputation?
- What has this person published?
- Have you read his work?
- Does what he or she says make sense to you?
- When you question them, do they answer honestly and responsibly?

I have known Dr. Robert Lifton, the late Dr. Louis West, and the late Dr. Margaret Singer—all targets of cult propaganda—for many years. [69] While I don't necessarily agree with everything they have written or done, I respect their positive contributions, which have been substantial. They were all United States military intelligence officers who studied Chinese brainwashing in the 1950's, and all were brave enough to publicly attest that the phenomenon exists. Read the information and disinformation for yourself about these individuals. Form your own opinion.

Do I believe every ex-member's story without seeking verification? No, of course not. Is it possible that some ex-members exaggerate their stories? Of course. Believing that all ex-members are credible or that no ex-member is credible is too simplistic and approach. But when many people relate similar experiences with a particular group, the information usually proves to be trustworthy. Most ex-members speak out at great personal risk and with little or no personal gain–other than the therapeutic effects of standing up to expose an injustice, and perhaps, helping others.

Former cult members and their friends and families are survivors. Their testimony is powerful evidence that a person can walk away from a

destructive group and go on to lead a contented, productive life. Hearing their stories can help set a confused cult member on the road to becoming a healthier person.

SUMMARY:

To truly connect with a cult member, you must understand his group, both in terms of its doctrine—*what* its members believe—and its tactics—*how* it makes them believe.

It helps to identify specific ways that the cult deceives members and keeps them dependent whether by distorting the truth, misinterpreting religious texts, or deliberately spreading lies about its critics. There are many ways to research cults:

- The Internet
- Cult literature
- Former members
- Other families
- Loaded language
- Attend cult activities

You have to be able to distinguish between reliable and misleading information. Cults have used different sources to spread disinformation.

- The Internet
- Cult Awareness Network (beware)
- Cult defenders
- Demonization of cult critics

Chapter 8

Interacting With Dual Identities

Time after time, friends and family of impacted people (cult members) have told me, "It's like he's a different person now," or, "We don't know her anymore!" Such stark descriptions of a split personality may seem simplistic, but anyone with a loved one in a destructive cult will recognize the syndrome. It is an eerie experience when, mid-conversation, you sense a different identity has assumed control. Recognizing the change, and acting appropriately are keys to unlocking your loved one's authentic self and freeing him from bondage.

In the following conversation, Arthur, the friend of a cult member named John, describes several traits that are common to the group identity of many members. [70]

SH: *You've already looked at some of the material on my website. Have you seen John yet?*

Arthur: *We talked on the phone.*

SH: *How did it go?*

Arthur: *Strange! He told me he reads* the Wall Street Journal. *That's not John! And another strange thing was the way he avoided my questions. He was more interested in what I was doing than telling me what he was up to, even when I asked. When I asked him if we could get together, I figured he might say, "I'm not sure." But he said "Let's do something next weekend."*

SH: *It's difficult to know how John will behave when you see him. It's hard for you to imagine where he is–and how far he is from where he used to be. In the conversation over the phone, you said he steers it towards you. That tactic sounds familiar. He's probably not going to want to reveal a lot of his beliefs, because he knows you won't accept them. It's easier to talk about you. Wait until you see how he acts around you. Members of the Lenz group* [to which John belongs] *are living a very difficult existence. They're under a lot of stress. John will be different than you remember, maybe by a frightening degree. It might be easy to get to the "old John" in certain areas, harder in other areas.*

Arthur: *It's sort of creepy to think I might not be talking with my old*

friend. You know, he referred to himself as "Jonathan" on the phone the other night. It's probably nothing . . . .

SH: *It's probably something . . . .*

As I've said, I believe that cult members suffer from a dissociative disorder which causes them to vacillate between the authentic identity and the cult identity. When dealing with a cult member, be sensitive to the differences between the two identities. Pay attention to *what* the person says; the way they *speak*–mannerisms, gestures, vocabulary, expressions, and the way they *act*.

The cult identity (Cultist John) and the authentic identity (Authentic John) may look and sound quite different: Cultist John may seem to stare through people. His eyes may look glassy, cold, or glazed. His posture may be more rigid, his facial muscles tighter. He may make you think of a robot or zombie. Cultist John may sound like a tape recording of a cult lecture. He may speak with inappropriate intensity and volume. He might whisper, mumble, or chant unintelligible syllables.

Authentic John's posture will appear looser and warmer. Eye contact may be more natural. Authentic John will speak with a greater range of emotion. He will be more expressive and share more willingly. He'll be more spontaneous and have a sense of humor.

SUB-PERSONALITIES

Cults use significant parts of the pre-cult or authentic identity to create the cult identity. In particular, cults tend to focus on elements of the psyche formed early in childhood. It's no coincidence that many destructive religious cults tell their members to become "children of God." They encourage their members to psychologically regress to a time when they were not capable of thinking critically, when whatever they were told was not subject to conscious evaluation or rebuttal.

During recruitment and indoctrination, cult members sometimes share activities–like sitting around a campfire, enacting skits, playing games or sports, and singing songs–that help new recruits revert to a childlike state. Leaders encourage members to talk about what they were thinking and feeling when they were little children.

In *rebirthing*, a technique that is supposed to help people recover from early childhood trauma, people are age-regressed back to their birth. One ex-member of an Indian Guru cult told me of her experience squirming and writhing in pain on the floor as cult *therapists* showed her a picture of the

so-called perfect master. She and others were told that the master was the reason they were being born–so they could become his disciple and submit totally.

The creation of my Moonie self

My cult self was the devoted son of the True Parents, a leader in the Unification movement, witnesser (recruiter), fundraiser, lecturer, celibate–holy, humble, self-sacrificing, small messiah to ten generations of my ancestors.

I have come to realize that my cult identity was not entirely new. Elements of my pre-cult identity were the seeds of its formation. My work with former members confirms this basic point: Indoctrination anchors itself to parts of our past–our forgotten, outgrown, or discarded authentic self, not just the child but to other aspects of as well. Analyzing my own psyche and my own indoctrination into the Moonies, I have identified four distinct sub-personalities that were co-opted by the cult.

The young child

To a child, parents are omnipotent authority figures. As we grow older, we inevitably become disillusioned by our parent's limitations, frailties, and especially where they exist downright abuses, but the needs, perspectives, and priorities of the young child remain embedded in our psyche.

Fairy tales play on the almost universal desire of children for a perfectly safe world, with perfect parents. Especially for those who grew up in orphanages, or whose parents were abusive or divorced, the child within us hungers for the perfect father and mother. Cults insist on the literal transfer of family loyalty. Jim Jones was one of many cult leaders to insist that his followers call him *Dad*. When the illusion of parental perfection is combined with singing, party games, and other age-regressing techniques, the universal child can present itself quite forcefully as a foundation for the new cult identity.

The idealist

A child of the 1960s, I believed in a world of truth, goodness, and justice. And I was in for a rude awakening. People lied, cheated and stole. I felt betrayed by people whom I considered my friends. As I grew older, I read utopian novels and longed for a day when the world would be a better place. I was told, "Don't be a dreamer! Grow up!" I did grow up, and this

part of my authentic identity was buried until I was swept up by the Moon cult.

Nineteen years old, sitting in a workshop where young adults from different countries were talking about God's original plan to create a world of peace, harmony, and goodness, the idealistic Steven said, "How wonderful!" That part of me was activated to form an important part of my cult identity. My Moonie mind was entranced with the fantasy that we were creating the kingdom of heaven on earth. In the new world, there would be no crime, poverty, or suffering. All people would be part of our family under the True Parents. Peace would reign.

Though my idealism may have made me vulnerable to recruitment, it was that same idealism that motivated me to eventually leave the group when I realized that Moon and the leaders lied, cheated, stole, and enslaved the members.

The religious/spiritual being

During my childhood, my family belonged to the conservative Hillcrest Jewish Center in Queens, New York. My mother kept a kosher home, and I attended Hebrew School, went to Sabbath services, and observed Jewish holidays. By the time I had my Bar Mitzvah at the age of 13, I was questioning some of the precepts of Judaism. I was uncomfortable with what I felt was an overemphasis on rituals and the past. Still deeply spiritual, I continued to pray, but I stopped going to Hillcrest (except to use the basketball court).

At 19, I was not searching for another religion. I was Jewish. I was trying to understand the nature of reality and my place in the universe. I loved philosophy and was very much interested with finding the meaning of life.

When I first encountered the Moonie recruiters, they denied they were a religious group. Later, they sidestepped the issue of Christianity and emphasized the Jewish belief in the coming of the Messiah. The indoctrinators knew my religious/spiritual aspect would be an essential factor in my cult identity. Ultimately, it was my faith in a God of truth that played an important role in my decision to exit the cult.

The warrior/hero

I was born in 1954 and grew up during the Cold War. I learned to hate and fear Communism, to be a patriotic and proud American. I remember

dreaming about war: assaulting enemy machine gun emplacements, throwing grenades, fighting for freedom. The enemy was always the Nazis or the Communists.

By the time I graduated from high school, I had become an anti-war activist. I grew my hair long and participated in peace protests. The young patriot carrying a toy gun was buried within me. I was recruited to join the One World Crusade as a heavenly soldier fighting Satan's Communism. (One of the Moonies' favorite songs was "Heavenly Soldiers for God").

In the Strategic Interactive Approach, we learn how to recognize when our loved one is speaking and acting from his cult identity. We try to connect with his cult identity. One key to communicating is to acknowledge that these sub-personalities have good intentions. Our aim is to help the loved one liberate the parts of his pre-cult identity that were co-opted by the cult identity, and integrate them back into his authentic self.

After I left the group, the sub-personalities that formed the core of my Moonie identity needed to be recognized, liberated, and integrated into my post-cult identity. I needed to find healthy alternatives for my religious/spiritual being. My warrior/soldier became engaged in combat with cult destructive influence.

If this therapeutic integration is not achieved, former members may remain at war with themselves. They may be afraid to open the Bible, to pray or think about God, if they were involved n a religious cult. They hate the part of themselves that is spiritual. They remain stuck with a black-and-white view of reality.

The essence of faith is not having all the answers, but trusting that goodness and truth exist, and that God exists. I consider it a tremendous setback if a person leaves a destructive cult and feels he must abandon or denigrate the spiritual part of his identity. Too many people have done just that by allowing a negative cult experience to dominate their lives.

Develop rapport with the cult identity

Many family members do not feel comfortable talking to a loved one while he is in a cult. Keep in mind that you are trying to help someone whose behavior and emotions are being manipulated. The more you encourage non-cultic behavior, information, thoughts and emotions, the more productive your communication will be.

In my first book, I focused my advice on eliciting the pre-cult self. With the SIA, I now encourage a dual focus which includes the cult

identity. Instead of waiting for brief encounters with the authentic identity, you can seek harmony and trust with the cult identity and enlist its positive qualities–like dedication and idealism–to help liberate the authentic identity. Rather than discarding the entire cult identity, we attempt to create a new, post-cult identity that incorporates the most valuable and healthy parts of the pre-cult, cult, and authentic identities.

Sidestep thought-stopping

Thought-stopping is used by the cult identity to block any idea, statement, or information that challenges the group's doctrine or leadership. In the Hare Krishna group, members are not permitted to question, doubt, or *speculate*. They are taught to chant, *Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna*, whenever speculations arise. The original intent of Hindu meditation was to connect with God, but the International Society for Krishna Consciousness has turned it into a thought-stopping process.

According to a former Scientology member: *In 'Bull Baiting', which happens during Scientology training, your coach's job is to get you to react. Whatever funny, embarrassing thing they say or do–no matter how outrageous–you must sit there like a robot or zombie. You can't smile or show any reaction. You're taught to disconnect from your feelings and thoughts. They'll even say in a taunting voice, "Oh you're in Scientology–you must be brainwashed! You're in a cult!" If you smile, you flunk. They'll go on and on baiting you, until you get to the point that you can hear all kinds of criticism of the group and don't react. I actually used a similar technique on my father when he tried to talk to me three months after I joined. He provided me with all the information I needed. He said he was concerned about me, but he was directly attacking the group. He showed me articles and a book called* The Scandal of Scientology *by Paulette Cooper. I needed to leave the group, but I just shut it out.*[71]

Trying to talk to a cult member who is using thought-stopping techniques can be a frustrating experience. As one father says, "How can we communicate? If I say anything, he'll start praying or chanting. He speaks very quietly and quickly. I'm not even sure what he's actually saying. He's repeating some phrase over and over. It's like he's a thousand miles away. I get so flustered, I can feel my blood pressure rising."

Perhaps the best way to counteract thought-stopping techniques (chanting, praying, speaking in tongues) is to avoid triggering them in the first place. Thought-stopping occurs in direct response to what are perceived as negative comments. Be careful not to make remarks that are critical of the

leader, the group, or the doctrine. Your loved one has been programmed to block this out.

When I was a member of the Moonies, I believed Scientology was a cult, I believed the Krishnas were a cult, I believed TM [Transcendental Meditation] was a cult, but I was convinced I was not in a cult. When my family confronted me with a news story about Sun Myung Moon owning an M-16 gun factory, I began to chant, *Crush Satan!* They would have had more success talking about Scientology or the Krishnas, which would not have triggered the thought-stopping process.

If you find you have inadvertently triggered thought-stopping, you have choices: Be patient and wait for the process to end (usually within minutes); or try to distract and interrupt it. Being patient and waiting is less risky than trying to change the subject, or interrupt. As your relationship improves, you will be able to experiment with different methods and learn what works.

Show interest in the cult identity

A good way to develop trust is to begin a dialogue with the cult identity. When he or she tells you, “Oh, it’s incredible! I’m doing these amazing things. you can say, “Tell me something that was really important to you this week. Describe it in detail. I’d like to know,” or, “Give me an example of how you feel.” Asking for examples, and counter-examples, is crucial when you are gathering information. Your loved one might say, “When I was meditating, I had a really profound experience.” In that case, you could say, “Tell me how it felt. Have you ever felt that way before? When?” This kind of question might help the cult member reconnect with his non-cult past. If your loved one replies, “When I was fifteen years old and fishing on the lake," you have just elicited the authentic identity. That is an important step. Then you can introduce a counter-example: “Have you had any experience that left you feeling lonely or disoriented? What did *that* feel like?”

Getting the cult member to talk about his experience provides an opportunity to build bridges. If you have had a similar experience, it might build rapport and trust. Experiment with ways for the cult member to provide you with information about his experience. If your loved one is artistic, ask him to write a poem or a song. Do any of the family members or friends practice meditation? If so, that person could describe his own experience. This communicates to the cult member, “You’re not alone. You don’t have to submit to a cult to have that experience.”

How do you know if there is a good rapport? Ask your loved one: On a

scale of one (low) to ten (high) “How much do you trust me?” Remember, this is a process. Ask, “What can I do you to make you feel more comfortable with me?”

If the response is to read a cult book, or attend a cult meeting, then fulfill the request. Families sometimes miss opportunities when their expectation is merely to convince the person to leave the cult. Impatience will only reduce rapport with the cult identity and reinforce cult indoctrination.

Reconnect with the authentic identity

When the cult identity takes over, a person’s past is redefined and distorted. After Moon recruiters convinced me to divulge a few painful experiences in my childhood (particularly one with my father), the group magnified the negatives and minimized the positives. I came to believe that my childhood was lonely and miserable. *Thank goodness the Father (Moon) showed me the way to happiness!*

When I got out of the group, I needed to sit down with old photographs and home movies. I had to be reminded that I used to go fishing with my father on Sunday mornings; and that he and my mother were always there to comfort me during bad times. I had to put my memories back in their proper perspective. I had to reconstruct the pre-cult Steve Hassan.

My former teachers, neighbors, friends, and family helped me remember that I bicycled across America when I was sixteen, canoed and fished my way across Canada to Alaska; worked on an archaeological dig in Israel with my friend Marc, enjoyed basketball, reading, camping, hiking, and horseback riding. When I was in the cult mindset, those experiences were trivialized, distorted, or manipulated.

Eliciting the authentic identity

As much as cult indoctrination attempts to suppress and destroy the authentic identity, it never completely succeeds. There are too many experiences, too many positive memories that don’t disappear. The cult tries to bury these reference points and submerge the person’s past. Yet, over time, the authentic, pre-cult self seeks ways to regain its freedom.

The authentic identity may continue to play an active role in a cult member’s psyche by:

1. *Creating illnesses, such as skin problems, asthma, or allergic reactions*, that give the cult member an excuse to sleep and take time off from his work schedule. If the illness is life-threatening, the cult member will feel justified in seeking outside medical attention.

2. *Exerting pressure on the cult identity to go home for a visit—* to collect clothes or funds, or to find new recruits. The purported reasons can be quite creative.

3. *Dropping hints when speaking to family members or friends*. I have had several families contact me after their cult son or daughter told them *not* to get a professional counselor to get them out. Before the cult member made that remark, the families had not realized that they could contact someone like me for help.

4. *Generating thematic dreams*. Former members describe recurring nightmares of being hurt or trapped while they were members of the cult. I know people who have had cult dreams of being lost in a menacing dark forest, being choked or suffocated, or being imprisoned in a concentration camp.

5. *Having a spiritual revelation that the member is meant to leave the group*. The cult identity does not want to leave the group, but the person follows his subconscious and runs away, hoping to find support and counseling.

When I was in the cult, I thought the old Steve, the *evil Steve*, was dead. Following the near-fatal accident that landed me in the hospital, I was out of the cult environment for over two weeks. To keep my cult self activated while in the hospital, I listened to Moon's speeches—in Korean with a simultaneous English translation—through headphones. When I left the hospital, my parents arranged for former members to conduct a deprogramming and I discovered that "I" was still there.

The Strategic Interactive Approach accelerates this process because it teaches family members and friends to:

- Reconnect the person to his or her past memories and experiences
- Facilitate positive exposure to non-members

- Provide enhanced access to outside information
- Bring to consciousness the negative experiences the person has had in the group

Helping your loved one reflect on his experiences

Because destructive cults never deliver what they promise, it is likely that your loved one will have had many disappointing experiences with the group. Even while buried, the authentic identity sees contradictions, asks questions, and records the disillusionments. An essential part of the SIA involves bringing a person's own experiences to light so he can process them.

During the later stages of the SIA process, cult members are able to verbalize specific negative incidents that occurred while they were members. They will sometimes recall traumatic experiences: for example, being raped by the cult leader, or being forced to lie, cheat, or steal. Even though they knew at the time that they were doing something wrong or were being abused, they were not able to process the experience or act on it while the cult identity was in control. It was only when the authentic self was given permission to speak out that these experiences came into consciousness.

Share feelings and perceptions, not judgments

The difference between perception and judgment is sometimes subtle. In the following example, a Team member, whose name has been changed here to Danny, makes the common mistake of drawing a conclusion instead of making an observation.

Danny: *If I were to ask [the loved one] a specific question like, "What research have you done about mind control?" I would feel him withdraw.*

SH: *Do you ever point out to him that, when you ask a specific question, you feel him closing down? It's not like him to act like that, so what's going on?*

Danny: *I think I pointed out to him that he is defensive.*

SH: *Saying he is "defensive" is a judgment. It's an evaluation, whereas if you're just reporting a feeling you're having and ask him, "What's that about?"–it's giving him feedback and asking him to reflect and perhaps have an insight.*

Rather than making statements, ask open-ended questions to elicit the most information: “Tell me what you think (feel) about your relationship with (Dad/Mom/your siblings).”

During most Strategic Interactions, family members realize that they do not always know what their loved one previously thought about specific people and things. I try to make them aware of how much they don’t know and motivate them to learn more, through an information-gathering process, from the pre-cult point of view to the present cult member point of view.

Younger brother: *I don’t know how to answer some of the questions on the Background Information Form.*

If you do not know the answers, ask others but, especially, ask your loved one. This is another opportunity to build trust and rapport while you gather information. Here are some of the questions you might ask:

- “I really don’t know you the way I want to. Tell me how things were before you got involved.”
- “How would you describe your relationship with Dad three years ago, before you joined?”
- “What would you like to change about your relationship with Mom or Dad?”
- “What was it like when you were growing up? What about now?”
- “How would you have wanted Dad to be different?”

The cult member might respond: “I wish Dad was more verbally approving/more supportive/showed more interest in me as a person. I’d like him to praise me and listen better.”

Remember, you will get a very different answer to these questions if the cult identity is the one responding. Be prepared to hear some painful, sometimes arrogant answers, but listen carefully. Not everything the cult identity says will be false. If the cult identity gives a negative generalization, like “Dad never listened to me,” acknowledge it. If you know of a time when his father did listen, remind him of it.

Cultivating rapport and trust

Rapport and trust-building should never be under-emphasized or

underestimated in any counseling situation or interpersonal relationship. If you do not have rapport, the person will not tell you what's really going on with him. He will not trust you. He will not listen to you. If a member has had eight years of confrontational and condescending remarks from friends or family members, it may take a year or longer of positive, constructive interactions to reverse that.

The healthier the pre-cult family relationships, and the stronger the member's sense of identity prior to being in the cult, the easier it will be to reconnect and get the person to open up. Until you have a sense of closeness, you shouldn't even mention his leaving the group. Instead, start doing things that will build the relationship.

Connecting with your loved one's authentic self

In many cases, I'll ask the father in private about his childhood and his relationship with his own father. Almost invariably, the father will have the same wish list as his son. When I ask, "Have you ever sat down with your son and shared what it was like when you were little?" most fathers say, "No." Then I suggest, "Next time you are alone together, go for a walk and start talking about your childhood." Sharing that conversation allows the son to identify with his father. There is empathy. It opens new areas to discuss: what it's like being a father; what it's like being a son; and how to improve their relationship.

It is essential for family members and friends to step out of their own reality–to think, feel and imagine the other person's reality. That is how you really get to know other people; how you show that you really care about them as individuals. You do not have to accept the group's teachings or the leader's authority. You have to recognize the cult member's reality is real for him and ask him to share it with you.

We are all different. Let's not assume we know what others are thinking and feeling. Strategic Interaction is about asking questions, learning, and experiencing. It is a process. The thrust of my approach is to meet the participants where they "are"—in their own unique reality.

Create a model of your loved one's present self

Mother: *I want to be able to step into your shoes and know more about your inner experience. Teach me! I'm curious! What are you thinking?*

Cult member: *You don't care about me. What I do is not important to you.*

Mother: *I want to be involved with your life. I do care about you!*

Cult member: *How come you didn't write to me in two years? How come you didn't visit?*

Mother: *I couldn't handle it. I felt it was my fault. Now I'm in therapy. I want to build a relationship with you. Help me. You're my son and I love you.*

This approach works much better than saying, "You idiot! Can't you see the Watchtower (or the Divine Principle, or Dianetics) is all wrong?" or "You put the group ahead of your family and friends. Get out!" or "You're no longer a member of this family!" In cases where families uttered these sentiments out of pain and frustration, the cult member needs an apology and time to heal.

Build bridges to life outside the cult

There are many ways to remind your loved one that he had a good life outside of the group.

- Look at photographs and home movies or videos
- Cook his favorite dinner or send home-baked cookies or other goodies
- Take him to a favorite restaurant that evokes positive memories
- Invite him to do things he once enjoyed. Go bowling. Go to sporting events. Go shopping. Go fishing.

An important part of rapport-building is a firm mutual commitment to the relationship. In the following discussion, two Team members, one an ex-cult member whom I'll call Billy, learn how to ask a cult member whom I will call Jeff for such a promise.

Billy [ex-member]: *Lenz would say to us, "You are all unhappy. You still have attachments to your past, your parents, your friends, your possessions, the place you used to live. Cut them! Get them out of your life! Throw away anything that reminds you of your past life." Lenz does everything he can to cut you off from who you are.*

SH: *That's why it's so important to connect with Jeff's authentic identity.*

Danny: *It's pretty scary. I love my brother. I don't want to lose him.*

SH: *Since he's just beginning to get really sucked in, I think the tack you should take is to tell him, "Promise me that nothing will ever come between us." If he says, "Of course," then you can say, "What happens if you move, and six months from now, Lenz tells you never to talk with me again?" Let him respond, "No, no, that would never happen." Then, you say, "But what if it did? I want your commitment that you and I are going to be able to communicate no matter what, even if I'm doing something you don't like, or you are doing something I don't like. We're brothers."*

If he asks, "Is anything else bothering you?" you can say, "Yeah, but as long as we keep talking and we keep an open mind—looking from different perspectives, looking for information—I know things will work out." Remember, in spite of his cult indoctrination, Jeff still has many connections, and that's why we are doing this Strategic Interaction. We want to prevent him from moving and cutting off everyone he loves and cares about, and becoming more controlled.

Connecting with the pre-cult and cult identities is an essential ongoing process in the SIA. In the following chapters, you will learn how to use your understanding of both identities to show your loved one that destructive influence exists, that other groups use similar techniques to control their members, and, finally, that their group is a destructive cult. But before discussing any specifics about cults or destructive influence, we will prepare ourselves for such conversations by learning and practicing new modes of communication that will help you get your message across without alienating your loved one.

SUMMARY:

Cult members suffer from a dissociative disorder, or dual identities, which causes them to vacillate between an authentic identity and a cult identity. When dealing with a cult member, be sensitive to the differences between the two identities.

Indoctrination anchors itself to parts of our past–our forgotten, outgrown, or discarded authentic self. Elements of pre-cult identity are the seeds of its formation.

Instead of waiting for brief encounters with the authentic identity, you can seek harmony and trust with the cult identity and enlist its positive qualities—like dedication and idealism—to help liberate the authentic identity. Rather than discarding the entire cult identity, we attempt to create

a new, post-cult identity that incorporates the most valuable and healthy parts of the pre-cult, cult, and authentic identities.

The best way to counteract thought-stopping (chanting, praying, speaking in tongues) is to avoid triggering them in the first place. Thought-stopping occurs in direct response to what are perceived as negative comments. Be careful not to make remarks that are critical of the leader, the group, or the doctrine. Your loved one has been programmed to block this out. Use your own life experience or stories or examples about other groups, situations and people, and ask the person what they think. This builds perspective.

Show interest in the cult identity. Getting the cult member to talk about his experience provides an opportunity to build bridges.

Reconnect the person to his or her past memories and experiences:

- Facilitate positive exposure to non-members
- Provide enhanced access to outside information
- Bring to consciousness the negative experiences the person has had in the group

Chapter 9

Communication Strategies

One of the hallmarks of the Strategic Interactive Approach is its focus on effective, goal-oriented communication skills. Communicating with a cult member can be a difficult and emotionally draining experience. This chapter describes skills that you can use to facilitate interactions with your loved one–whether it is by email, letter, telephone, or face-to-face.

After each phone call, letter, or visit (what I call mini-interactions), you can assess which efforts are getting results and which need adjusting. One of the goals of the interaction is to gain information about your loved one–what his life in the group is like, how he has been affected by his cult involvement–and to educate him about undue influence as well as other destructive cults. Ultimately, your aim–and this is a critical objective of the Strategic Interactive Approach–is to motivate the cult member to question his own cult involvement: to research and consider alternative points of view and to think critically and independently.

Rather than attempt a knock-out blow, the objective will usually be achieved as the cumulative effect of many interactions. Along with information-gathering, rapport and trust-building are the foundation for using the more advanced techniques described in chapters 10 and 11.

After every interaction, try to assess where you are in the process and have an idea of the next several steps that need to be taken to assist the cult member. When planning future interactions, each Team member should ask himself: "Will this step bring me closer to the goal, or take me further away?" Only say and do those things that enhance your relationship and assist the cult member to act independently.

One of the most common mistakes made by the friends and family of cult members is to approach the person prematurely. I received a call from a woman whose husband had joined the Jehovah's Witnesses. After reading my first book, she had started gathering information to discredit the group–articles pointing out contradictions in its doctrine—and was trying to force her husband to look at it. She kept at it for over two years but, each time she criticized the group, she further injured their rapport. By the time she contacted me, their marriage was falling apart. I told her that she needed to back off, learn how to communicate effectively, and rebuild her relationship through marriage counseling–before even thinking about raising any more

criticisms of the group.

In most cases, Team members have to engage in a series of mini-interactions over days, weeks, and, possibly months before the cult member expresses even the first inkling of doubt. Each interaction should advance the goals of building trust, gathering and providing information, and sowing doubt. By rehearsing actual conversations with your loved one, you will learn how to anticipate his responses and react appropriately.

REHEARSAL

The best way to prepare for a telephone call or face-to-face meeting with a cult member is to rehearse. Anticipating your loved one's responses makes goal-oriented communication much more effective.

For example, I met with a couple whose daughter had broken off contact a year earlier. While we were discussing their options, I asked, "What would happen if you saw her on the street or in a shopping mall?" The father looked bewildered, and said he didn't know. "We just don't think fast on our feet," added the mother. I told them, "The only reason I think fast on my feet is that I practice. I make it a habit to imagine different scenarios—from the best possible to the worst possible—and rehearse my best response to each in my mind. That way, I already have a range of choices that I've thought out before I speak directly to the person." Practice can give you the confidence and mental readiness you need.

Before you speak with your loved one, visualize yourself having a conversation. Imagine the best possible scenario, the worst possible scenario, and the most likely outcome. For example, picture yourself asking the cult member to spend some time with you.

Best possible scenario:

- The cult member says, *"I have the day off. We don't have to be here. Let's go into town or somewhere fun."*
- You already have a few ideas about where to go and things you want to talk about—for example, the phobia cure (chapter 10).

Worst possible scenario:

- The cult member says, *"I don't trust you–you've never come to visit me before. Maybe you want to deprogram me."*
- You have work to do. You might ask, "What can we say to reassure you that we would never violate your rights and force you to do something against your will?"

Most probable scenario:

- The cult member says he's asked a friend to join you for the visit and adds, *It's better if we stay here.* You say, *Okay, if that's what you want, this time.* Then you ask the other member, *What is your name? Where are you from? How long have you been involved?*

After a pleasant, non-confrontational meeting, the cult member and leaders will not consider you a threat. Next time, you might be able to have some time alone. They might allow both of you to leave cult property.

By anticipating and rehearsing different scenarios, you will eliminate the unknowns that create fear and anxiety. If you find yourself saying something that elicits a negative response, try something else. The better you understand the cult member, the more accurately you will be able to predict his response. For many people, learning to be deliberate in your communication with a family member is awkward. But this kind of rehearsal strategy is often employed in the business world, especially in sales. The more you rehearse, the easier it will be to constructively influence the person in the cult.

Intention/delivery/response

An important part of goal-oriented communication is the ability to assess

your intended message, your delivery, and your loved one's response. When you practice asking a question or conveying a piece of information, keep in mind these three stages of communication:

1. Intention: what you mean to express. (*I love you so much.*)
2. Delivery: the words you use and how you say them–your facial expression, tone of voice, and speed
3. Response: the reaction you get–what the person actually *heard* and *saw*

For example, a cult member's father may want to tell his son, *I care about you*. But perhaps he is shocked by his son's appearance, so he asks, *Why are you dressed that way?* The delivery is sarcastic and critical; the cult member's response will probably be defensive. He may express his feelings with body language–diverting his eyes, furrowing his brow, or crossing his arms–or with words: *This is who I am. If you can't accept me, that's your problem.* Focus on their reaction. If you don't get the reaction you want—increased rapport or information—rethink your choice of words and delivery. Think back to what you meant to express, and find another way to say it.

Team members should not become frustrated or impatient when they do not see immediate results. If you are doing the right things, you may not get the best response possible—but you won't get negative responses, either. Think of your relationship with your loved one as a cup with holes in it. During the SIA, you fill the cup with love, rapport, and trust. But the cup will continue to leak until you figure out where the holes are. Once you identify what needs to be changed below the surface—which phobia you have to undo, what information you need to get and give—you will begin to see positive results.

Role-playing

The next level of preparation, beyond visualization, is to role-play. At first, most people need to be coaxed into doing a role-play, but the more they practice, the easier it becomes. I usually start by playing the role of a family member or friend while they play the cult member. We focus on a situation where they typically find themselves getting stuck and do not know what to say—for example, why they think their loved one is being misled by the cult

leader. Putting themselves in their loved one's shoes and hearing my response can give them new ideas about how to express themselves. Eventually, everyone on the Team takes a turn.

During role-playing exercises, you also play yourself and share things you want to say to the cult member (played by another Team member). This gives you the opportunity to rehearse responses to different points the cult member might make.

Former members can be adept at teaching you what to expect and how to act. The more experience you have with former members who can role-play the typical cult member, the more accurately you can predict how the loved one will respond.

Communication techniques

Remember, when speaking with a cult member, your thoughts and judgments can be communicated with a few words, an expression, tone of voice, or a gesture. I recommend a non-confrontational, curious, yet concerned attitude, and close attention to non-verbal communication: Smile. Speak in a calm, friendly tone. Touch the person, or at least shake hands. Give your loved one a hug.

Sometimes it's hard to extend the hand or offer a hug if the cult member looks rigid or distant. Go ahead and take the initiative. If you have a history of not hugging or kissing, ask for permission. See if they reciprocate. You're better off trying than doing nothing.

Consider spatial distance—too close feels intrusive, too far away seems too impersonal. Try standing a little closer and see if they back off. I look for an opportunity to pat the person on the back, perhaps as we walk out of the room together. Pay attention to your hands. They are sending messages, too.

Eye contact is reassuring for some people; others find it makes them nervous. Watch for nonverbal responses to discover how to increase their trust in you. If the cult identity is the only part that will interact with you, then try to expand the cult identity's world. You might try asking why a member of the Governing Body (the elite leadership of the *WatchTower*) left the group, still believing in God, and has written books about his 60 years of experience within the organization.

A strategy used in debates is that whoever defines the territory of the discussion has the edge. Rather than discussing the doctrines of a group, I shift the focus to the beliefs of other controlling people or groups. With

religious cults, it helps to talk about your spirituality and faith. If you find common ground, it will be easier to talk. Spell out criteria that you can agree on. This takes you a step closer to the goal of helping the person broaden his perspective.

INTERACTING WITH YOUR LOVED ONE

Email, telephone calls and visits are your primary modes of contact with your loved one. Your communication might very well be the most important link the cult member has to the outside world. Every time you interact with your loved one–by email or text, by telephone, or in person–you create an opportunity to influence the cult identity and access the authentic self.

WRITING

The written word is a powerful medium of communication, and I recommend making each email, text or letter count. It is the one mode of communication over which you have complete control. Think, plan, and use written communication as the foundation of your efforts. As always in the Strategic Interactive Approach, your first goal is to develop higher levels of rapport so that they will look forward to hearing from you and will want to correspond. The next goal is information gathering. Once you have achieved these two goals, you can move on to advanced techniques. The following suggestions may help you compose a message to your loved one:

- Start warmly and end warmly
- Keep it short (avoid long-winded treatises)
- Focus on one or two key points
- Re-state points raised in past calls and notes
- Ask follow-up questions relating to past interactions
- Coordinate communications efforts with others

Sometimes it's not necessary to send a letter, or even show it to anyone else. I find that, for some people, it is helpful to purge their anger, frustration and hurt, to say exactly what you feel, holding nothing back. This is a good way to maintain your sanity. You might be surprised at some of the points that come out.

Strategies for effective letter writing

The most effective strategy involves a multi-step writing and editing process. First, write the first draft of the letter. Put the letter aside for a few hours or a few days. Open it again and pretend that you are the cult member. Imagine what he or she might think and feel as you read each line. By putting yourself in the shoes of the cult member, you can appraise the effectiveness of what you have written. As the cult member, do you feel closer to the author of the letter? Does the letter motivate you to share yourself with him? Does it encourage you to reflect upon your experiences? Edit the letter as many times as necessary, until you feel it has achieved maximum effectiveness. You can also ask siblings and former members what they think of the letter and take suggestions. I spend a good deal of my time helping family members and friends edit important letters.

Sample letter to a fictitious cult member, Alex, from his father

Dear Alex,

I've been thinking about you since we spoke last Saturday. It was a good talk, one of our best, I think, although I got off the phone thinking I wished I knew you better. You are a fine young man and I'm proud of you, although I struggle to understand some of your choices. What did you think of last week's conversation?

I hope we can spend some time together soon. Perhaps you could get some time off and we can go on a fishing trip together, just the two of us. Wouldn't that be great? I remember the times we went up to the cabin when you were younger. I'll never forget the time when I got so excited by that huge fish on my line that I stood up in the canoe and tipped us over—and how we laughed! Which memories stand out for you?

I wish I had spent more time with you as you were growing up. I guess I was too busy trying to be a 'good provider.' Often, when I got home from work, I was so tired that I just shut down and watched TV. I wish I could go back and do things differently. Was I a bad father?

One of the things we learn as we grow and mature is how to make wise decisions—ones that we will feel good about ten, even twenty years from now. What do you see when you imagine yourself in ten years? Twenty years?

I would like you to send me that book you mentioned. As I said to you on the phone, I will do almost anything. I promise I'll take notes and ask you

the questions that come to my mind, as long as you promise to take the time to answer them for me. I don't want someone else to explain the group's philosophy to me. I want you to do it. You're my son and I trust you.

I'm sending along a copy of a recent photo of your mom, Billy, Sandy, and me at the last family reunion. Everyone asked about you and they hope to see you soon. I'll speak with you again on Saturday, right?

Love,

Dad

Keep a copy of every letter

If a letter gets lost or the person never receives it, you can say, *Don't worry. I make a copy of each letter that I send you. I'll send a copy tomorrow. Watch for it*. I recommend writing even if you don't get a response. When you finally do manage to re-establish contact, your loved one might tell you that he never got any of your notes. When you see him in person, you can give him the pile of letters and say, *Here are all the letters I wrote to you*. Seeing the sheer effort that was put into writing–not to mention sitting and reading all of them–is usually a very positive and emotionally powerful experience for the person.

Privacy and censorship issues

Some groups go so far as to screen members' email and calls. Some secretly destroy letters and will not allow private telephone calls. Politely ask your loved one if anyone else reads your letters. Ask former leaders of the group if they are aware of any policy of reading members' mail. If you don't know for sure, I recommend that you assume the letters are being read by one of the controllers.

If you're concerned that your loved one may not be receiving your letters, tell him when you speak that you will write once a week or once every two weeks and that he should look for your letters. If your loved one works outside of the cult, you might consider sending letters to his place of employment. You can even offer to open a post office box for him, if he is receptive. If your loved one has a family and lives in a house, try sending picture postcards. That way, everyone can share.

For most cult members, knowing that their mail or email is intercepted or thrown away by leaders is a major source of tension. It is a graphic demonstration of information control and often leads to disillusionment.

You can ask questions like, *Isn't it strange that letters I write to you seem to disappear? When I write to your brothers and sisters, they always get my letters!* Avoid the temptation to draw critical conclusions (*They are stealing your mail*).

Frequency and regularity helps, but don't overdo it

It is better to write a short note once a week than a long letter once a month. If the cult member ignores your letters, try to make a verbal pact to stay in touch. If the cult member is a rebellious 19-year-old, he may not want the parent to write or call once a week. In that case, find out what works—it might be once every two or three weeks.

Coordinate letter writing

It will look suspicious if no one in the family writes for months and then suddenly the cult member gets a stack of letters. The most common explanation is that everyone in the family got together (at a family event, birthday, anniversary, or a family counseling session), and talked about how much they all love and miss him.

When you initiate a new pattern of communication, contact your loved one, preferably in person or on the telephone, and say, *I really miss you. I want to stay in touch. I'm going to write a letter every week or two*. Just receiving a letter from the outside world is positive because it reminds cult members that their friends and family care about them, and that there is an outside world with people who want them back.

If you have a large family and circle of friends, it is best to prioritize who should start communicating. People who were closest to the individual before the cult involvement should be the first to call or write. Once the most important relationships are reestablished, other members of the Team can join in and initiate contact.

Follow-up

People in cults are usually tired and busy. They often don't remember what they wrote or spoke about last week. Do not assume that your loved one remembers what you said in your last note or conversation. Remind him and restate: *When we were talking on the phone, you were saying . . .* or *I've been thinking about the issue you wrote about in your letter . . .*

Choose the most benign topics. You can avoid negative comments or

statements, and focus on ones that will help you advance the relationship. Do not remind the cult member of things that could divert you from your Strategic Interactive goals.

Be creative

Enclose a poem, watercolor, joke or cartoon (make sure he or she would find it funny). Ask if your loved one wants any DVDs or CDs, maybe a favorite movie, or music he used to enjoy. When you write, try to include photos of yourself with your loved one. Whenever you visit, take photographs of you and him, as well as other Team members and cult members. Sometimes photographs can be used for reality-testing—especially if the cult member looks uncharacteristically thin or overweight, or depressed.

Send gifts on birthdays and other important days

When the cult member receives a package of Grandma's home-baked cookies and shares them, other members will enjoy them, too. It will give your loved one a good feeling about the outside world.

It is generally not a good idea to send money. Cash usually must be turned over to the group. The last thing you want to do is enrich the coffers of the cult. However, you might consider sending an occasional small gift of cash ($20-$100). By sending a little cash, you might help to create constructive dissonance. On the one hand, the cult self knows he should surrender the money. On the other hand, the real self might need to buy something for himself.

Offering a laptop or a smartphone is sometimes a great idea–as long as the cult member promises he won't donate it or let others use it more than him. This way, your loved one can check his email. Suggest that he check with his superiors, and make sure he will be allowed to keep the computer. If for some reason, the leaders make an excuse to commandeer the computer, it can be a great source of frustration for your loved one. It might even lead to his leaving the cult. Some family members have sent a non-cashable return airline ticket with a note that says: *Please use this anytime. Whenever you have an impulse to come home, just get on the plane!* A travel agent can advise you about how to get such a ticket.

TELEPHONE CALLS

Practice specific communication skills to help you make more effective calls

to your loved one. Tape-record each session so that you can listen to, and evaluate, the conversation. Role-play on the phone, paying attention to what people at the other end say, and how they say it. Try to match their style. The closer you can mirror, match, or pace the person you are talking to, the stronger the rapport will become.

Auditory Level: Whisper if they whisper; speak loudly if they do.

Speed: Talk as quickly or as slowly as they do. Allow exaggerated pauses after asking a good question, even if it's a long-distance call.

Diction: Use words that are neutral. Do not use words such as *brainwashing* or *cult*, which can be alienating.

Mood: If they're in an upbeat mood, join them. If they're down, don't tell them to cheer up. Ask them why they're feeling the way they do.

Content: Seek areas of agreement to establish rapport. If it's a religious cult, talk about spirituality. With a therapy cult, their process of growth. With a commercial cult, discuss business issues.

As always with the Strategic Interactive Approach, it is a good idea to begin each telephone conversation warmly. Show interest in how the cult member is feeling. Ask what new things he is learning. Give plenty of reinforcement: *I really enjoy talking with you. It helps me to feel closer to you*.

Periodically assess your level of trust. Ask him, on a scale of one to ten: *Where am I now—a three? What can I do to make it a four, five, or six?* In general, rapport and trust are heightened when you find areas of mutual interest and identification.

Pay attention to how *you* are feeling as well. Some people feel more resourceful standing rather than sitting. You might feel comfortable sipping a cup of tea. You don't want to find yourself shouting into the receiver.

Visualize

Visualize your loved one when talking on the telephone. Imagine the expression on his face and listen to his tone. This process will give you more information than merely processing the person's words.

Silence is communication

If you ask a question and there is silence on the line, wait at least five full minutes before gently repeating the question. You want the cult member to think and reflect. Do not let the cult member change the subject. Gently restate the question you asked, or remind them what they were last saying.

Prepare for future calls

Have a list of things to talk about in front of you:

- Something you enjoy doing
- Something you want to do in the future
- A book or magazine article you are reading
- A movie you saw
- New friends you made
- Positive spiritual experiences–if it is a religious cult
- Information about other groups or cults
- Questions you would like to ask to follow up on previous conversations

It is better to make one good point over and over in different ways. A barrage of questions will cause mistrust. It is easier for the cult member to think about one question. When faced with too many, he will just shut down. Remember, judgmental statements are not conductive to building trust.

Take notes

With each call, take notes: Record the date, time, and what is discussed. This will allow you to track your progress and maintain continuity. If you're emailing, summarize the conversation and send pertinent points to others on the Team. I have started using a free program called Evernote and have found it a very useful website and smartphone/tablet app that synchronizes everything—from photos to emails to web site URLs.

When you call your loved one and another cult member answers, ask for information about that person: *What is your name? What do you do? Are you a leader?* If this person fails to deliver a message that you called, you

can identify that person to your loved one–a potential source of dissonance.

Access the pre-cult self

Team members should learn to recognize whether their loved one is in cult mode or not. If he is warm and friendly, bring up positive pre-cult memories, tell jokes, discuss other family and friends. If he's hostile, arrogant, or defensive, change the subject or end the conversation. When you feel you are losing your resourcefulness and the cult identity is in full gear, be patient. Wait for another time.

When is the best time to call?

Try to find out when there will be no others around so you can talk undisturbed. Find out from your loved one what his schedule is like: How much time does he have to talk? If he has ten minutes, use it. Let him tell you he has to go. Don't tell him when his ten minutes are up. If he is enjoying the conversation, keep talking.

In communal cults, there are usually only one or two telephones and they may be monitored. If so, there are probably other members nearby or the phone might be tapped. If other cult members are listening, you will probably be speaking to the cult self. Private time is usually late at night or early in the morning. Begin the conversation with: *Is this a good time for us to talk? Are you free?* If not, ask when you can call again. Offer a pre-paid telephone card so they can call you when they have a moment.

Minimize distractions

Try to make your telephone calls during periods where you can give the conversation your undivided attention. Visitors talking, animals barking, children crying, a television blaring, or a doorbell ringing are not conducive to goal-oriented communication.

You should also consider your privacy when talking on the phone to your loved one. Calling from work may seem convenient, but your employer or co-workers may be listening. If these people are not part of the Team, their comments and attitudes might be counter-productive or downright discouraging.

Pass the telephone to others

When you talk to the cult member during a family gathering, try passing the phone around to key people. Try to maintain a sense of normalcy. Describe what you see, hear, and smell: how people are dressed, what you've been discussing, the smell of a favorite food. Tell your loved one you wish he were there. Make him *want* to be there.

Emergency telephone calls

Tell the cult member that if he ever needs to speak with you, call collect–anytime. Parents can give the cult member a calling card number, but ask him to use it to call family and friends only. Some parents order an 800-number so the cult member can call toll-free. If you don't have an answering machine or voicemail, get it immediately. You do not want to miss any messages.

When your loved one calls in the middle of the night, it is usually important. Chances are you'll be awakened from sleep and very disoriented. Take a moment to turn on the light, sit up and become alert. Your first task is to assess if the cult member is upset and is reaching out to you for help. Ask, *Where are you? What is happening?*

The cult member might be deliberately trying to catch you off-guard, to tell you they can't come home for a visit or pressure you for money. If this is the case, tell him politely that he woke you up from a deep sleep and that you would like to speak with him about his request tomorrow, when you are awake. If he is in his cult identity, try to get off the telephone as quickly as possible and go back to sleep.

On the other hand, late-night emergency calls can occur when the person wants to escape. If the cult member is crying, seems upset or confused, comfort him and tell him that you are glad he called you and that you want to help. Tell him to start from the beginning and tell you everything that is going on. Be prepared for long silences. If there is no response after waiting several minutes, gently ask him if he is still there, and repeat your last question or echo what he was saying. Be confident, reassuring and direct. After you find out what has happened, tell the person to go somewhere without telling the cult, and wait for you to come get him. If he is in another city, state or country, try to put him in contact with a local resource person. But don't get off the phone too quickly to make arrangements. Keep him talking as long as possible.

Hopefully, you will have an emergency plan in place before such a call is received.

Learn from each interaction

Typically, family members will get off the telephone and say, *I wish I had said this*, or *I should have said that*. Instead of dwelling on something you cannot change, accept what happened as part of the learning experience. Visualize yourself having the conversation—except, this time, saying what you wanted to say. This way, you rehearse effective communication and feel good about it. Remember, with the SIA, you must keep a positive focus.

When an interaction does not go well, remember that every Strategic Interaction is an opportunity to learn and grow. One way to learn from your experience is to record conversations with the cult member on order to assess the conversation later. In many states, recording is legal if one party in the conversation consents to it. If you feel comfortable with the idea, check your local laws.

To Do

- Have a list of things to talk about
- Call when the cult member is most likely to be alone
- Start warmly and end warmly
- Assess whether you are talking with the authentic identity or the cult identity
- Speak about other groups
- Minimize distractions
- Make one or two good points well and repeatedly rather than using a shotgun approach
- Restate and follow up on topics and questions
- Allow for silence
- Pass the telephone around during family gatherings
- Accept collect calls at all hours

FACE-TO-FACE INTERACTIONS

Seeing your loved one after a long time can be an emotionally charged event. During face-to-face meetings, Team members must remember that they are allies, not foes, of the loved one. Make *win/win* suggestions, not *yes/no, win/lose* demands. Ask non-threatening questions, but don't make assumptions or criticize. Pose hypothetical (*What if..?*) questions and remember to speak about other people, other groups. Give specific examples. It is likely that you will be communicating with the cult identity, so be prepared.

During any silences, try not to fidget or wriggle your leg or arm, look out the window, tap your fingers, or jingle coins. Wait patiently for his or her response. Hopefully, at the end of a visit, your loved one will be left with feelings of love and warmth. He will wish you wouldn't go—or better yet, that he could leave with you. Even if your loved one lives far away, try to visit at least once every six months.

When to ask your loved one to visit home

A positive home visit is essential, but the timing must be strategically good. A cult member's commitment to the group will vary over time. If the member has just returned from a three-week cult workshop, you can expect him to be pumped up. Conversations will be saturated with loaded language and propaganda. This is not a good time to invite him home.

On the other hand, your loved one might be at a point where he is disillusioned with the group, the leader, or the doctrine. If his closest friend in the cult has just been transferred to another state, he might be especially receptive to an invitation to visit home. I once counseled a young man who left the Moon cult after secretly reading *Combatting Cult Mind Control*. One of the things that set his exit in motion was his first visit home after three years in the cult. During his visit, he was able to see old photographs of himself and his family, meet with his friends, and sleep in his own bed. The visit reactivated his pre-cult self.

If you have good rapport, your loved one will share disappointing and disillusioning experiences with you. These are the best times to invite your loved one home. It is essential to keep inviting, even if he does not come. It is possible he is being discouraged—or even denied permission—by the cult. The more opportunities you create, the sooner your loved one will realize the cult intends to keep him away from his family and friends. Other approaches you can take:

- Become friendly with your loved one's immediate superiors and ask them for help in making sure that your loved one can come home.
- If the cult member never seems to be allowed to visit, suggest that he bring another cult member with him. This will give the group and the cult member a sense of security.
- Invite your loved one to specific events on specific dates.

Broken promises

Consider the following reaction to a cult member's promise:

Brother: *So, you're coming home? I'll believe it when I see it. You never keep your promises. We asked you if you were coming home for Thanksgiving, and you said, 'Sure!' The family got all excited. Then you never showed up. You had something more important to do–like saving the world by selling candy bars on the street corner.*

Let's review the *intention/delivery/response*:

Intention: *I want my brother to keep his promise. I want to see my brother.*

Delivery: *I'll believe it when I see it.* He sounds angry and sarcastic.

Response: *The cult member doesn't want to visit or even speak with his brother again.*

In fact, the cult member may have been detained at the last minute by the cult. This happens. Cult members are often led to believe they will be going home in a month or two—but when the time comes for the visit, a leader will say, *We need you right now*. Sometimes, the cult member will become angry at the leader for breaking his word. This is a positive step.

When a cult member breaks a promise, it is important to express disappointment. Don't get angry at the cult member—it may not be his fault. Create some feeling of responsibility, but go easy on making him feel guilty. You want him to *want* to see you.

Don't think your loved one isn't disappointed, even if he sounds happy. He has been conditioned to hide negative thoughts. But beneath the surface, there is dissonance between the cult identity and the authentic identity. If a cult member is denied permission over and over again, the dissonance may grow into disillusionment.

Don't take the experience personally. Remember, the authentic self probably *does* want to come home. The authentic self is registering every disappointment and broken cult promise.

If your loved one has broken his promises several times, you might ask him to think ahead: *Will you give me your personal word that, even if you are asked to do something at the last minute because it is an emergency, you'll still come?* The disappointment and disillusionment will be even greater if they are again denied permission.

Reinforce the authentic identity

During home visits, family members sometimes go out of their way to remind their loved one of his cult responsibilities–such as eating only vegetarian food, calling the group regularly, waking up early for cult practices, and even being on time for the train ride back to the cult. This is counterproductive. You never want to remind your loved one that he isn't being true to the cult, or that he is breaking cult rules. Doing so will just reactivate the cult identity. If the cult member's behavior shifts away from the cult norm, go along with the change. Reinforce the positive.

Think of the future

Team members sometimes get stuck and can't see that their future dealings with the cult member could be different from past dealings. A family member might say, *She never lets me talk about that*. More constructive would be to say, *I haven't yet figured out a way to talk with her about that subject*. Both in attitude and specific interaction, you want to learn to communicate constructively. Ask him what would need to change so he would want to come home. Get him to tell you what's blocking him or what would motivate him to visit.

Assessment and feedback

One of the most critical aspects of the SIA is evaluating the impact of your actions on your loved one. *What works? What helps?* will be crucial questions. Always watch your loved one's reactions. If your approach isn't working, try something else. Don't rely solely on your opinion of the situation. Talk it over with other Team members. Did they have the same impressions? By paying attention, you will be in a better position to know if your efforts are effective or misguided. Assessing your loved one's responses could be a challenge. At any given moment, the cult member

could be expressing the authentic self, the pre-cult self, or a mix.

When asking the cult member a difficult question, take it one step at a time.

Step One: Visualize talking with your loved one.

Step Two: Hear yourself asking the question: *How would you feel about a meeting with a former member of your group?*

Step Three: Listen to the response: *I wouldn't want to talk to any apostates.*

With that visualization, I already know it will bring up the cult identity and shut off the dialogue. When your visualization tells you that something will not work, change gears. Find a less threatening way to discuss issues and accomplish your goals. For example, try another question: *How would you feel about meeting a former member of a another group?* Perhaps you can see the cult member saying, *I don't know if it would be useful, but sure– if you want me to.* If you can visualize a positive response, try asking the question. If your loved one responds as you imagined, you'll know your model of the cult identity is accurate. If the actual response is nothing like what you imagined, your model needs refining.

Family and friends should develop an accurate model to predict how their loved one will respond with each interaction. Track the responses over time. If you ask good questions, your loved one will give answers that reveal something about his reality. It will be your loved one's authentic identity speaking, helping you enter his world. From there, the next step will be to help him to identify implanted phobias and dismantle them.

To Do

- Develop rapport and trust: Always start warmly and end warmly. To develop rapport with the cult identity, try participating in rapport building activities-- sing songs, prepare food, wash dishes, dance, pray together.
- Negotiate with your loved one to find mutually acceptable solutions.
- Bargain: (*I'll go to the meeting if you spend some time alone with me.*)
- Invite your loved one to specific events.
- Invite your loved one's friends to visit.
- Review your communication strategies.

- Keep records of the date, time, and subject of conversations.
- Make sure to record names (of cult leaders, other members).
- When you learn new information, write it down. If you don't feel comfortable keeping a journal, buy yourself a small digital tape recorder and then transcribe your notes.
- Discuss observations and developments with Team members.
- Learn from your experiences.

SUMMARY:

The Strategic Interactive Approach's focus is on effective, goal-oriented communication. This is quite different than just saying whatever comes to your mind. The key goals are: rapport and trust building; information gathering; and, once the foundation is laid, more advanced "Freedom of Mind" techniques designed to empower the true self and disempower the cult self. The cumulative effect of many interactions will, usually, best achieve the objective.

Anticipating and rehearsing best case, worst case and most probable responses, makes goal-oriented communication much more effective. Eventually, role-play situations, ideally, should be coached by a person qualified to give effective help.

An important part of goal-oriented communication is the ability to assess your intended message, your delivery, and your loved one's response. Keep in mind three stages of communication:

- Intention: what you mean to express. (*I love you so much.*)
- Delivery: the words you use, how you say them, your facial expression, tone of voice, and speed
- Response: the reaction you get, what the person actually *heard* and *saw*

Use non-confrontational tactics, a curious, yet concerned attitude, and pay close attention to non-verbal communication

When interacting, whether through writing or telephone calls, create a situation where you can pay close attention and follow-up on your planning.

There are many pitfalls to be prepared for in face-to-face interaction including broken promises.

Always watch the reaction your interaction stimulates. Then adjust your future communication to create the intended consequence.

Chapter 10

Unlocking Phobias

When I first learned about phobias, about four years after being rescued from the Moonies, I immediately recognized a major tool commonly used by individuals and organizations practicing undue influence. In order for a person to regain his or her freedom, they must overcome their phobias. This realization led me to develop a therapeutic technique called the three-step phobia intervention. This method lies at the heart of the Strategic Interactive Approach.

In my opinion, phobia indoctrination is the single most powerful technique for keeping people dependent and obedient. I have encountered numerous individuals who had long ago stopped believing in the leader and the doctrine, but were unable to walk away. They were psychologically paralyzed with indoctrinated fears which often functioned subconsciously.

Psychological prison

Several years ago, a former member of a small music cult in a northeastern city contacted me. He had read *Combatting Cult Mind Control* and wanted to help his friend. The friend, whom I'll call Michael, had been imprisoned by the cult leader—locked in the study of his own home—for twelve years. He had been ordered by the leader to give up a successful career as a psychologist and to spend his time composing and copying music. The leader persuaded Michael's fiancée, who had been recruited by Michael himself, to become his jailer. She brought him food and let him out to use the bathroom. Through phobia indoctrination, he had come to believe he would go insane, hurt himself or turn criminal if he ever left the house.

I asked the man who had contacted me if he knew Michael's family. He told me that another member of Michael's family had left the cult ten years earlier. I encouraged him to get in touch with that person to see if he would be willing to read my book and to help. Fortunately, he was.

Meanwhile, Michael's twin brother had sent him a computer and a music copying program. Surprisingly, the cult leader said he would allow Michael to leave his house unescorted to attend computer courses. After interacting with strangers in the outside world, Michael realized he wasn't going insane, nor was he going to commit any violent crimes. He loved

being outside, even though he was still phobic about breaking away from the cult leader. A while later, he was given permission to attend his parents' fiftieth wedding anniversary. Using the techniques outlined this book for communicating with cult members who are still under destructive influence, the family member persuaded Michael to contact the *other* former member, who told him about the cult leader's abuses. Michael decided to leave permanently.

Soon after, Michael did some counseling work with me. This therapy helped free him from his fears and to reconstruct a normal and positive life. In the spring of 1998, while I was teaching a workshop for the Society of Clinical Hypnosis in Sweden, I was surprised to see Michael in the audience. He had moved to Denmark, resumed his profession as a psychologist, married, and had a daughter. He is now engaged in professional cult recovery work.

A cult phobia is a man-made mental illness that is an integral part of destructive influence. Older rescue methods like deprogramming and exit counseling don't deal with the paralyzing phobias. In the Strategic Interactive Approach, we acknowledge the importance of phobias, and cure them before we engage our loved one on a rational, cognitive level.

WHAT IS A PHOBIA?

A phobia is a persistent, irrational fear. All phobias are triggered by a cue that initiates a closed cycle of fearful images, thoughts, and feelings. The cue can be an internal or external stimulus, such as a thought, image, word, smell, taste, feeling, or behavior.

This stimulus causes the phobic individual to generate negative images, often subconsciously, and sometimes to imagine impending doom. During a phobic reaction, the body's automatic physiological (*fight-or-flight*) survival response is activated. This panic response causes a number of physiological symptoms, including a racing heart, shortness of breath, dry mouth, cold hands and sometimes nausea. The most common coping mechanism is to avoid the provoking stimulus.

Phobias destabilize and undermine a person's view of reality, their perception of emotional and intellectual control, their self-confidence, and judgment. Typical phobias include fear of public speaking, heights, dark places, drowning, spiders or snakes. It is estimated that some 40 million Americans suffer from some type of phobia.[72]

Cult Phobias

In my experience as a cult member, there were specific incidents where fears were either installed or activated by my recruiters. During my initial three-day workshop, cult leaders implanted the fear that I couldn't trust my own thinking capacities due to unseen negative spiritual forces (Satan) that were supposedly affecting my mind and spirit. I had never believed in Satan or any such evil metaphysical entity but, by the end of three days, part of me (the nascent cult self) had come to fear these diabolical forces.

Moon made efforts to instill more direct, personal, and graphic phobias. In 1974, all New York members (myself included) were taken to see *The Exorcist,* a movie about a young girl who is possessed by an evil spirit. Moon then held a meeting at his Belvedere estate in Tarrytown, NY, and told members that this movie was made by God, and was a prophecy of what would happen to anyone who left the Unification movement.

During recruitment and indoctrination, phobias of the outside world and of the pre-cult self are methodically implanted, nurtured, and employed. The critical faculties that would allow a non-phobic person to analyze the claims of the leader and the doctrine are short-circuited. Independent thinking or action is precluded. Fear prevails over logic.

Common Cult Phobias

Because these fears are part of an entire belief system, and actually become part of the cult identity, their impact is more extensive than any single phobia. The cult identity has a host of phobias to keep it imprisoned.

One of the most universal phobias is fear of the so called "anti-cult" network. Members of large, established cults are told that they will be kidnapped, tortured, or raped by deprogrammers and exit-counselors. Cult leaders claim that these deprogrammers brainwash parents to hire them. These stories not only make members fearful and distrustful of their families, they bind members in fear of what they believe is a massive, well-funded network of hate criminals. To any well-informed person, this belief would be laughable, but millions of people in cults accept this nonsense.

If you are up against a well-known cult, you may learn from former members the specific phobias used to program members of that group. When dealing with a smaller, more obscure group, you may have to rely on reading cult literature, attending functions, and discussions with current members. I have attempted to create basic categories for cults, but

some phobias could be placed in several categories.

Physical health

- Die painfully, be murdered, or commit suicide
- Become ill and die (of cancer, AIDS, or a heart attack)
- Cause their loved ones to become ill and die
- Be hit by car, bus, or train, or die in an airplane crash
- Be beaten and/or raped
- Be accosted and robbed
- Be disfigured
- Become (or remain) overweight
- Become anorexic and not eat
- Become a homosexual
- Become a drug addict
- Become a prostitute
- Develop sexual perversions, or contract incurable sexually transmitted diseases
- Become deaf or blind
- Die from drugs or poison
- Have problems sleeping
- Be subjected to invisible toxic rays
- Cause one's children to be stillborn or deformed at birth
- Cause one's children to become sick or die young
- Cause one's children to be killed
- Cause one's children to commit suicide

Psychological health

- Go insane

- Be committed to a mental institution
- Be subjected to drugs, electroshock, or be lobotomized
- Be a failure
- Be a sexual deviant
- Become less intelligent
- Lose one's memory, talents and abilities
- Lose control completely
- Never be happy
- Be controlled by past traumas
- Never develop the mind properly
- Suffer for the rest of one's life
- Lose one's dreams

Spiritual life

- Become unspiritual or unbalanced
- Lose one's relationship with God
- Be attacked by supernatural entities
- Be possessed by evil spirits/demons
- Lose one's chance of redemption/salvation
- Miss, reject, or persecute the Messiah, Apostle, Avatar, or Enlightened Master
- Never make it up the *Bridge to Total Freedom*
- Lose your immortality
- Be spiritually attacked, raped, or killed while one sleeps
- Never achieve enlightenment
- Be beset by lower spiritual forces
- Not be saved
- Be reincarnated 10,000 times as a roach or other odious creature

- Be trapped in *illusion* forever
- Be haunted by problems from one's past life (e.g., one murdered people in a past life and, without the group's help, will kill again)
- Have problems with future lives
- Be judged unworthy when Armageddon takes place
- Burn in the eternal lake of fire when Jesus returns
- Find one's soul rotting in hell forever

Social life

- Lose the safety and security of the group
- Be unloved
- Never be able to trust anyone again
- Be rejected by others
- Never find a good wife/husband
- Only attract people who hurt, victimize, rape, beat, torture, or rob
- Be controlled by others
- Be rejected by family and friends
- Be abandoned
- Never speak to children or grandchildren again
- Be harassed
- Disappear
- Lose one's job
- Never get a good job or promotion
- Never be financially successful
- Commit crimes
- Be accused unjustly
- Be put in jail
- Be abducted and held prisoner

- Be persecuted by evil agents
- Be persecuted by psychiatrists or mental health practitioners

More paranoia instilled in cult members:

- Fear that one is being spied on and followed
- Fear of race wars
- Fear of rioting or other criminal activity
- Fear of nuclear holocaust, WWIII or cosmic cataclysm
- Fear of alien beings who kidnap people and perform bizarre experiments
- Fear that the earth will be destroyed
- Fear of terrorist attack and chemical or biological warfare
- Fear of an evil conspiracy by a covert group (Satan, One-World Government, the Antichrist, the Illuminati, the CIA, etc.) to enslave everyone

Not all groups use the same phobias; some focus on just a few. Some fears may be grounded in fact–some groups *have* spied on ex-members who are actively fighting them. There *is* a social stigma attached to being an ex-cult member. Cults *do* try to keep family members who are still in the cult away from ex-members. A few cults have even gone so far as to kill perceived enemies.

METHODS FOR PHOBIA INSTALLATION

A common first step in installing a phobia is to induce the cult member to enter an altered state of consciousness, or trance. In such a state, the conscious mind is side-stepped and information is accepted with little or no critical evaluation. Many cult members are forced to meditate, pray, sing, or chant—sometimes for hours—before a lecture or sermon is preached, inducing a state of consciousness similar to being under hypnosis or the influence of certain drugs.

In the Moonies, we would often be robbed of precious sleep so that we could drive to the Moon estate early in the morning. We would sing holy songs and pray for hours–individually, then in unison–before listening to a

speech by Moon. That way, our minds were more *spiritually open* (cult lingo for *receptive*). In reality, we were in a trance, and certainly not thinking analytically or critically.

Direct suggestion is one of the most common installation techniques. For instance, a leader might say: *You will die of a heart attack if you ever lose faith and leave*. Typically, his tone of voice is one of absolute authority and confidence, his eyes are fixed, and his index finger is pointed directly at members of the audience.

Indirect suggestion can be even more effective. For example, cult members may be told, *Whenever a member loses faith and leaves, something terrible happens*. By not stating specifics, individual members are free to fill in the blanks with their own greatest fears: the ex-member could be trapped in a room full of rats, be possessed by evil spirits and machine-gun his own family, set fire to himself and jump off a building. Indirect suggestion invites the person's deepest, darkest fantasies. In many cases, the most powerful fantasies are ones that emanate from within your own psyche.

The use of stories and testimonials. Cult leaders may use stories about defectors to reinforce phobias: *(Do you remember Alice M? She left the group last month and we just got word that she hung herself. See what happens when you leave the protection of the Almighty?)* These stories are usually fabrications. Sometimes, they are partly true (the person did leave the group).

Former members who return to the group may be asked to speak about the sin, greed, or suffering they encountered in the outside world. They describe how they were mugged, raped, plagued by terrifying nightmares, or suffered unrelenting migraine headaches until they came back to "God's family." The more horribly graphic, the more effective the story.

Books, movies and news stories. The late Frederick Lenz ("Rama") told his followers to read Stephen King novels; he was attempting to make them afraid of losing his protection from dark spiritual forces.[73] He also recommended Carlos Castaneda's books, which describe evil entities and demons.[74] The horror movie/book genre offers tools for cult leaders to

manipulate members.

Though not used—to my knowledge—by destructive mind control cults, I believe Steven Spielberg's *Jaws* is one of the most effective phobia-indoctrination movies ever made. It made more people afraid of swimming in the ocean than any sea monster could.

News items are excellent for eliciting fear and inculcating phobias. Cult leaders like to tell members about floods, earthquakes, fires, famines, plagues, and wars–as proof that the *last days* have arrived. They love to proclaim the destruction of the non-believers of the world. In addition to the biblical types, there are extraterrestrial-oriented cults, many of which say that the world will soon perish, and that only believers will be saved or charged with running the new world order.

Employing existing phobias and fears. Converts are encouraged to reveal detailed information about their past—particularly any traumatic events or psychological disorder. Cult leaders can then activate old phobias or create new ones. Traumatized parts of the pre-cult identity are often used to help create a dependent, phobic member. If they find a person with an irrational fear of being buried alive, they tell them, *Hell—which you will experience if you leave the group—is like being put into a deep hole in the ground and having dirt slowly shoveled on you throughout eternity*. To the suicidal type, they might say, *Go ahead and leave. You'll wind up killing yourself*. If the person was a drug addict, they might be warned that they will go back to drugs if they leave.

The member's fears are tapped to include anything designated as a threat to the cult identity, such as any thoughts, feelings, or information critical of the cult leader, doctrine, or organization; criticism of former members or the group; any doubts or thoughts about leaving the group.

Once these phobias are in place, the cult member becomes filled with a sense of helplessness and hopelessness about escaping. Cult leaders want to cultivate low self-esteem and manipulate members to work harder for praise and promotion.

In small, personality-type cults, control can be much more intense, because there is more direct contact between master and slave. These abusive relationships are often less ideological, with little or no formal doctrine or rituals, but the control can be quite effective, especially when existing fear and guilt are exploited. The authoritarian controller can use his or her anger and open-ended threats to dominate a victim.

Joanne, Alan, and Gus

For instance, I was once asked to help with a case involving a father, his son, and my client's daughter, whom I'll call Joanne.[75] She was eighteen years old and Catholic, when Joanne learned she was pregnant. She told nobody and underwent an abortion. On the bus ride home from the abortion, Joanne was befriended by Gus.

Gus brought her to the house where he lived with his son, Alan. Her parents knew nothing about the pregnancy or the abortion, only that their daughter had suddenly decided to leave home and live with two strange men. They hired a private investigator, enabling them to locate their daughter.

Frustrated and anxious, the parents waited outside the house until Joanne appeared. When they saw their daughter she was gaunt and dirty, wearing baggy, paint-splattered overalls—a far cry from the designer jeans she'd been accustomed to wearing. In a monotone, Joanne accused her parents of trying to control her and said they were jealous that she had found people who truly loved her. Her parents were determined to help Joanne, but they didn't know what to do.

Gus—a tall, strong man with a confident, deep voice and penetrating eye—was a drinker with a history of being verbally and physically abusive. In a crude but effective way, he controlled his son and Joanne. She was forced to work long hours in their business as an unpaid housepainter. She was drilled to be obedient and was berated and occasionally struck by Gus—particularly if she disobeyed him. Alan was also subjected to verbal and physical abuse by the father. Gus began to force himself sexually on Joanne. I later discovered that Alan had secretly been having sex with Joanne behind his father's back.

Unlike cases that involve large, well-known cults, I had little information about Gus and Alan. So I decided to make an exploratory call. I told the two men I was a counselor who had been contacted by Joanne's parents to look into the situation. I took the tack that the parents were trying to control their daughter, who was probably just acting out and enjoying her newfound adult freedom.

Gus was suspicious at first, but soon he was doing his best to con me into thinking that Joanne had been mistreated by her parents, and that he was doing her a favor by letting her stay at his apartment. He agreed to let me come over to talk further with him, his son, and Joanne. Before we hung up, Gus unexpectedly told me I could bring the parents along. He wanted to

prove that he was acting in Joanne's best interests. We were nervous, but delighted.

When the meeting started, Gus seemed to regret his suggestion that the parents come along. He'd obviously been drinking. He had counted on Joanne's complete submission, but her secret relationship with Alan had caused dissension in the ranks. Alan had already told her how much he hated his father.

I did my best to act as a facilitator and let everyone take turns at talking. Within an hour, it was clear that Joanne was happy that her parents were there. She wanted to escape from Gus, but still cowered in fear of him. We were shocked when Gus threw up his hands and blurted out, "Go ahead! Go back to your family and get back on the abortionist's table." He had used the guilt and fear caused by the abortion to control Joanne.

The parents were aghast. To their credit, they didn't say or do anything to alienate their daughter. The pieces quickly fell into place: Joanne's parents told her they loved her and begged her to come home. Their love and acceptance opened the door. Joanne had been afraid that they would reject and condemn her, but skillful intervention proved otherwise. Case solved.

THE THREE- STEP PHOBIA INTERVENTION

The three-step phobia intervention is an effective way to unlock cult phobias. Unfounded fears are stripped of their power and seen for what they are—proof of the group's banal destructiveness. I have been teaching my clients and other mental health professionals this three-step method for years, with great success. Although a trained therapist will have better success when implementing this approach, a well-prepared family member can do it as well.

Often one of the Team members will stand out as the best choice for implementing the process. A once-phobic family member who has been cured makes an especially effective interventionist. A family member who is a psychologist, social worker, or clergyman would also be in a good position to address these issues. In my experience, almost all cases of phobia are cured through visualization, suggestion, and experience. Most of the time, this method takes surprisingly little time.

The three-step phobia intervention can be summarized as follows:

Step One

The cult member is told what a phobia is, how it differs from a legitimate fear, and its potential impact. Using examples of different phobias, you explain how a cure is possible.

Step Two

You explain how other destructive groups or people deliberately install phobias to control people. You provide several examples of cult phobias, and ask the cult member what he thinks of these *other* groups. You give examples of how former members of other groups came to understand phobia indoctrination, and applied the cure to themselves.

Step Three

Finally, you discuss the specifics of your loved one's relationship or group. Once the person sees that his situation—like the other groups you discussed—involves phobia indoctrination, much of the hold will loosen. Ask your loved one if he has ever talked with a former member of the group who had left and is happy they did so? Would he be open to doing so, even if only to show the family that he isn't controlled by fear?

It is probably best not to attempt to do all three steps all at once, nor is it wise to spread them out over many weeks. Timing the steps so there is continuity is most effective. Ideally, you want cult members to make the connections at their own pace.

STEP ONE: PHOBIAS AND THEIR CURE

Discriminate between legitimate fear and phobia

I recently had a discussion with a 32-year-old, athletic man named Eric who had a fear of drowning due to two traumatic childhood incidents in the water. He told me he would be participating in a triathlon in the coming weeks and asked me if I had any ideas of how to overcome his fear.

I noted the two traumatic events, but my first step was to assess Eric's *competence*. "Have you had swimming lessons? Have you practiced long enough to feel confident?" I asked. "No, not really," he replied, and added that he didn't even know how to float. I described competence-building steps like learning to float and tread water comfortably for a long time. As Eric develops more competence–and confidence–it will be easier to clear up any residual trauma from the past.

What if your worst fears came true?

Drowning is a scenario that needs to be taken very seriously indeed. But many phobias have much less serious consequences. Pretend that all of your worst fears are realized, and ask yourself: *Then what?* This question often takes people by surprise. I have found that getting people to articulate their fears helps drain phobias of their power.

People with a fear of public speaking (one of the most common phobias) may see members of the audience getting bored, falling asleep, walking out, or telling one another how stupid or ill-prepared the speaker is. Once they verbalize their fears, they usually chuckle at the absurdity.

As with any legitimate fear, practice can provide the skills, competence, and confidence necessary. (Do you know the material? Do you have note cards, or an outline of your major points in front of you? You can always pause and take a long sip of water while you reorient yourself.) I don't know a single professional speaker, including myself, who hasn't experienced the panic response. We've simply learned to manage it.

The bottom line is that, even if these people give the worst talk of their life, they'll survive. Perhaps their ego and reputation will be temporarily bruised, but they will probably become stronger from the experience.

Discussing phobias with your loved one

As the cult member listens to this information, he might ask, *Why are you telling me this?* Ask the cult member if he has any phobias, or knows anyone who has a phobia. If the answer is yes, then simply reply that this information could be helpful. If the answer is no, a family member who was cured of a phobia or knows someone who was cured can discuss the benefits of understanding phobic reactions.

Sister: *Do you remember how I was afraid to go into elevators? Well, I'm cured!*

Cult member: *How did you do that?*

Sister: *I didn't realize it but I was seeing negative images in my mind. I saw myself plummeting out of control, to my death. My heart would race. I'd breathe fast, which made me really panic and avoid even the thought of an elevator. I went to a therapist who taught me to discriminate between rickety, old elevators and safe, modern elevators. I learned to visualize myself going up safely and comfortably. I learned how to pay attention to my breathing–to breathe very slowly and deeply.*

If you're not sure whether the cult member has digested this information, ask questions and spend more time talking about other phobias and cures. If he becomes defensive while you are explaining phobias, it is likely that the relationship lacks sufficient rapport and trust. Back off! Don't try to force this on your loved one. It is better to wait and find the right time, place, and person to deliver the phobia intervention. The foundation of the intervention must be solid, because the next two steps are built on Step One.

STEP TWO: EXPLAINING HOW OTHER GROUPS USE PHOBIAS

Now that you have laid the groundwork by explaining the difference between legitimate fear and phobia, the structure of a phobic response (negative images, negative self-talk, and physiological reactions), and strategies to cure phobias, you can proceed to Step Two.

During the next conversation, perhaps a few hours (or a few days) later, the sister would describe how she met a former member of another cult group. That person was programmed to believe that, if he ever left the group, terrible things would happen to him. It kept him trapped until he met other people who had left the group. These ex-members were happy and secure. This knowledge made him question whether his fears of leaving the group were real.

It is essential to continue communicating with the cult member in a way that doesn't trigger thought-stopping. By alluding indirectly to other situations, you can give your loved one information about phobias without triggering a reaction. Choose your words carefully. Use terms like *cults*, *brainwashing*, and *destructive influence* only if you can do so without jeopardizing rapport. Other loaded terms include: *closed organization, destructive group, authoritarian society, indoctrination*, and *closed mind*. If you press on, the phobia may persist, and you may lose rapport with the cult member.

Use examples of other groups

To prepare for this step, you should educate yourself–through research on the Internet or the library—about three different cults. Find out how they use phobias to control their members and imagine how you might explain their methods to your loved one. It helps to talk about a group that the person considered a cult before his own involvement. The focus should be on how the organization undermines the personal autonomy of its followers. Some of the higher-profile cults include: Jim Jones and the People's Temple at Jonestown, Guyana (the 913-person mass murder/suicide on November

18th, 1978); kidnapped heiress Patty Hearst and the Symbionese Liberation Army; David Koresh and the Branch Davidians (the standoff between that group and the FBI in Waco, Texas); Luc Jouret and the Order of the Solar Temple (mass suicides in Canada, France and Switzerland); Shoko Asahara and Aum Shinrikyo (who launched a nerve gas attack in Tokyo); Marshall Herff ("Do") Applewhite and the Heaven's Gate suicides. The Unification Church (the Moonies), Scientology, and the Jehovah's Witnesses–all recognized by most people as destructive cults–are other good examples. Unfortunately, for young people under thirty, many will not even know about these destructive groups. So using examples you know they can relate to, like ones in books, movies, television series might be more effective.

Be sure to include a cult that has similarities to your loved one's. If the person is in a Bible-oriented cult, use at least one example of another Bible cult. If the group is a therapy cult, learn about other therapy cults. The same applies to political cults, large-group training programs, business cults, and so on. Rapport and trust with the cult member are crucial to accomplishing this step effectively.

Breaking the ice

During a conversation with your loved one, raise the subject of how you've been thinking about a particular group after reading an article or book, seeing them featured on television, or having been approached by them. This should be part of a two-way dialogue and not a lecture. Start with a group that is least like the cult member's group—a group that he would agree is a destructive cult. Pacing is vital. Go step by step and don't rush. Remember—most cult members believe that there are destructive cults; they just don't think their group is one of them. This is your chance to discuss that issue with the cult member.

Explain how amazing it is to you that Group X actually installs phobias in its members' minds to keep them dependent and obedient. Review the material in Step One, but this time apply it to Group X. If you think the cult member will be responsive–rather than suspicious and defensive—tell him that you spoke with an ex-member of this other group. It's always best to use real people as examples because then you can ask the cult member at a later time if he is open to speaking with this former member.

Talk about how members of these other groups are trained to have only negative images and negative self-talk about the outside world or their past. Discuss how the phobias are installed. Try to cover phobias that apply to your loved one's group, but camouflage the approach. We want to deliver the information in a way that will be heard and digested, so it can slip past

the cult identity's filters.

Talk about how members in those other groups are taught to think there is no legitimate reason to ever leave, and how defectors are considered to be weak, deranged, selfish, and no longer spiritual. You might even try to arrange for your loved one to see how such phobias are indoctrinated in members of another group, perhaps by attending one of their meetings.

You will know that you have communicated effectively when the cult member agrees that other groups control their members with phobias and that bad things do not necessarily happen to those who leave. You have made exceptional progress if the cult member agrees that these other groups vilify former members and critics in order to deprive them of information.

Don't be disheartened if you are not able to cover these points sufficiently in one conversation. Be careful not to force information on a cult member who is evasive or resistant. This does not mean that you've failed. It just means there needs to be further rapport and trust-building.

STEP THREE: DISCUSSING THE SPECIFICS OF YOUR LOVED ONE'S SITUATION

At this point, your loved one should understand what a phobia is, how to cure one, and how other people or groups use phobias to control people. It is essential that the first two steps of the phobia intervention be performed properly so that you can begin discussing your loved one's situation without triggering a phobia.

The goal of this final step is to have the person make the connection between his group and the other groups you've discussed. You want your loved one to see that his group—like those other cults—is manipulating its members. Your purpose is not to prove that you are right or to attack the cult member but, rather, to get him to apply the phobia cure to himself.

Ask the cult member to make a comparison

If sufficient rapport and trust have been established, you should be able to build on the discussion of other groups that you began in Step Two. You can start by asking the cult member if he has ever thought that his group does anything similar to these other groups. If he asks, *What do you mean?* You can say, *I was just wondering–when you think about leaving the organization, what comes to mind?* Allow a long, silent pause so that he can think about the question.

Typically, the cult member will play it safe by asking, *What do you mean by that?* This gives you the opportunity to go one step further and ask, *I was wondering if it's possible to leave your group and have a good life.* If the group is religious, you might ask, *Do you believe it's possible that someone could leave your group and still be with God and be fulfilled?* Again, you should wait patiently for an answer.

Encourage the authentic self to speak

One of the most powerful questions you can ask a person is: *If the group never existed, and you were happy with your life, what do you think you would be doing?* My experience in asking cult members that question is that, at first, they will look at you blankly and ask, *What do you mean? I'm happy right now!* If you get this response, you can repeat the question, this time emphasizing the hypothetical *if: But I'm just curious*–if *this group never existed–for example,* if *the Moon organization or* if *the Osho group never existed–and you had a happy, fulfilling life, what would you be doing right now?* If he replies, *Oh, I would be a drug addict*, or *I would commit suicide*, you may have uncovered the phobia. If the person refuses or is unable to give a positive choice, back up a step. Ask a more general question: *Do you believe anybody outside the group is satisfied and happy with their life? If so, can you give me an example of the kinds of things people could be doing that would make them feel they have a good life?*

You want to get your loved one to state those things that are meaningful to him, such as, *I'd be married and have a child*, or *I'd be a teacher*, or, *I'd be sailing around the world*. The aim is to engage people's authentic selves and help them to imagine a happy future. Ideally, once they visualize the future as a dissociated image–like a picture on a screen–you can have them step into an associated picture and describe what it feels like, for example, to actually stand at the front of a classroom teaching children and feeling gratified by the experience. Remember, this is a process. It is not something to be completed in one conversation.

Discussing former members

Another goal of Step Three is to motivate the person to meet with former members of his group. Toward this end, you can ask your loved one, *Do you know anyone who left the group and is happy and fulfilled?* This is a very important question. Typically, cult members will say things like, *Well, I know someone who left and she committed suicide*, or, *I know someone who left but he no longer believes in God*. They might even say, *No, I don't know*

anyone who has left and is happy now. In that case, your next question could be, *Do you believe it's possible to leave your group and be happy and fulfilled?*

An alternative strategy is to follow up on Step Two—where you talk about other cults like David Koresh's group, Jonestown, or Heaven's Gate—by saying, *Well, help me out here, but it seems like you're giving me the same kind of answer as the people we talked about earlier*. You might ask, *Where did that belief come from?* You want to get him to speculate about a person who has left the group and is doing well. Then you can ask your loved one, *If such a person existed, would you be willing to at least meet with him or her?*

The point here is that you are working on multiple levels. You're dealing not only with the cult identity but also with the person's authentic identity. Hopefully, by covering all the issues–what phobias are, how to cure oneself of a phobia, and how phobias are indoctrinated into people's minds–he will connect the dots. My experience when doing this intervention is that it is most effective when I don't expect the cult member to admit, *Ah-hah! I have a phobia so, therefore, I'm under mind control*. Instead, I try to engage people in an open conversation that allows them to draw their own conclusions. When you are really curious, and you're trying to understand how the person's group is different from these other groups, you can often make the most progress. Ultimately, you want to help the cult member develop the facility to imagine himself out of the group, enjoying life to the fullest.

SUMMARY:

Phobia indoctrination is the single most powerful tactic for keeping cult members dependent and obedient. Individuals may stop believing in the leader and the doctrine, but are still unable to walk away. They are psychologically paralyzed with indoctrinated fears.

One of the most universal phobias is fear of the anti-cult network. Members of large, established cults are told that they will be kidnapped, tortured, or raped by deprogrammers and exit-counselors.

Methods of indoctrinating phobias:

- **Direct suggestion** is one of the most common installation techniques

- **Indirect suggestion** can be even more effective
- **Stories and testimonials**: stories about defectors can reinforce phobias
- **Books, movies and news stories**
- **Employing existing phobias and fears**

Three-step intervention:

- **Discriminate between legitimate fear and phobia.**
- **Teach structure of a phobia and how they can be easily cured.**
- **Use examples of phobias used by other authoritarian people or groups**
- **Ask the cult member to make a comparison and to imagine what would happen if they decided to walk away and be in control of their own mind and life?**

Chapter 11

Promoting Freedom Of Mind: The Prep Meeting And Beyond

Without a doubt, one of the most important things I have learned is that, although reading a book like this one can be an invaluable resource, the ideal situation is to have a two-day preparation meeting with me or an FOM consultant. This face–to–face meeting with family, friends, and other trustworthy resource people is vital to the success of virtually all cases. This should be arranged as soon as possible. This can take place in Boston, if people are willing to travel, but it often proves unworkable for a large group of people to fly in for such a meeting. In most cases, one of the FOM consultants goes to a location chosen by our clients. This meeting is for people on the Strategic Interactive Team and not the individual we are preparing to help.

Meeting together to truly share information and experiences and explore family dynamics is a huge step forward. The FOM consultant often likes to arrange time to meet with all key people privately to see if they would like to share anything in confidence. After making it safe to share information, it is up to the consultant to determine how best to proceed.

The preparation meeting is a crash course in all the things the participants need to know about destructive influence–social psychology, cults, phobias. Everyone gets a real taste of the kinds of information that will be shared with the cult member. Where possible a former cult member is invited to attend at least part of the "prep" meeting. Team members learn more about the mindset of the cult, including buzzwords, key beliefs, and practices.

Team members also learn and practice, through role-playing, the kinds of communication techniques described in this volume and techniques customized for their loved one. It really takes practice to take the ideas presented and learn how to convey them. People who attend these meetings have told me they were transformative and very helpful in dealing with other areas of their lives such as work, family, friends and children. In recent years, while it is ideal to have all key people in attendance, I have done "prep" meetings with a sibling over the Internet (using Skype) in China and Australia as well as across the United States. While not ideal, it is far better than not participating at all. I can imagine doing more virtual meetings as

the technology improves. However, I might also comment that many of the truly important conversations are done privately, in individual, intimate in-person sessions. It is much harder for people to feel the intimacy over the Internet. Therefore, it might take longer to build the rapport and trust so critical to sharing vital private information.

In addition to gathering information, helping to mobilize team members to work together, and learning effective communication strategies, the prep meeting is also useful to brainstorm all the ways we could help the individual. Figuring out the unique strengths and weaknesses and the dimensions of each case is vital to creating the Strategic plans.

In the Strategic Interactive Approach, we want to help the individual grow both on an emotional level and on a cognitive level—to *feel* and to *think* more freely.

From this point, the Strategic Interactive Approach consists of a series of mini-interactions—phone calls, letters, visits—each of which is designed to help open your loved one's mind to points of view beyond the cult perspective. The aim in each strategic interaction is to progressively move your loved one through a series of steps.

- By asking hypothetical *what if* questions, you help him see alternative points of view and to think more critically.
- By talking about the negative experiences of people in other controlling situations, you plant seeds of doubt that could blossom into concerns about his own life and well-being.
- By encouraging him to reflect on the history of his involvement, you help him reality-test and, ultimately, to see how his involvement has not lived up to his hopes and expectations.

Ultimately, the goal is to motivate him to ask questions and research his own involvement. This can be done in many different ways: by speaking with others who have themselves been through something similar; reading books and other written material; or looking at videos or movies that may open their mind. This step is critical; when your loved one looks beyond the present "closed" perspective, he uses his own mind rather than the cult-controlled mind. Through creative story-telling parallels and metaphors and by encouraging him to consider future possibilities, you help him to imagine

life outside the cult or situation—a stepping-stone to actually leaving it.

Important Ideas about Reality

1. Every individual has his own sense of reality and is connected to a shared reality with others.
2. Our perception of reality is influenced by our inborn characteristics and abilities, psychological development, emotional states, and belief systems.
3. Our view of reality is influenced (positively and negatively) by memories, beliefs, needs, and social influence.
4. We all filter and edit the information detected by our senses–we emphasize some things and eliminate others. Otherwise, we would be overwhelmed by information. In fact, a considerable amount of brain function is devoted to inhibiting incoming information.
5. We can never be 100% certain that our picture of reality is objectively correct.
6. We never fully know another person's reality.
7. We are not capable of fully communicating all the things that make up our sense of reality.
8. We can't assume that what we believe is more than a constructed view of reality.
9. Our internal monologue interprets, and sometimes distorts, our sense of reality.
10. We can control some of our inner and outer reality. Total control is impossible although, through discipline (meditation or hypnosis), the mind can develop greater degrees of control.
11. We can't control all of our reality all of the time.
12. No matter how much we improve and work to enhance our sense of what is real, it is always incomplete, imperfect, out of focus, and distorted.
13. The more distorted our sense of reality, the more certain we will

be that what we believe is accurate.

14. The more insistent a person is about the accuracy of his or her observations, the more likely it is that his or her sense of reality is distorted.

QUESTIONING, NOT CONFRONTING

With a curious yet concerned attitude, ask your loved one to help you understand how and why he joined in the first place. What is his daily life like now? If you show that you are genuinely interested in his point of view, you will model the kind of open-minded perspective that we hope to nurture in him.

Confrontation is the least effective way to get individuals to talk about their involvement. In the heat of the moment, family members sometimes forget that their loved one is under destructive influence. They might make declarations and try rational argumentation, forgetting that the cult identity has been trained to block out discordant information. Rather than making statements about his cult or about cults in general, begin by *asking* questions.

Ask the cult member about his new circle of friends. Often families don't pay enough attention to other cult members and their backgrounds. It is tactically important to find out the names of immediate superiors as well as the overall hierarchy. These questions should be asked with a matter-of-fact attitude and from a rapport-building, information-gathering perspective.

Appropriate questions to ask your loved one

Remember to take your time and be patient when waiting for a response. Allow long silences and gently re-phrase the question if the answer is off-track. Ask for specific examples—try to get him to access his memory.

- What are the positive things about the group and about being a member? What are the negative things?
- Who are your closest friends in the group? Tell me about them.
- What jobs do you do? How much say do you have about your job and how it is performed?
- What have you been learning?

- Have you had any interesting experiences? Tell me about them.
- Do you travel? Where do you go?
- What is your schedule?
- When do you wake up?
- When do you typically go to sleep at night?
- Where do you sleep? In a bed or on the floor in a sleeping bag? Do you have enough privacy?
- When is the best time to telephone you?
- Do you have questions or serious doubts about the group? Can you share them with the group? If so, how are your questions answered? If you have doubts, would you feel comfortable sharing them with me?
- What were your lifetime goals before joining the group?
- Have they changed? If so, how have they changed? Do you think they might change again?
- What independent research have you done concerning the group? Are you open to learning more?
- How much do you actually know about the leader's background?
- You don't depend solely on the group for information, do you?

If you get vague, evasive answers like *I don't know*, work on building rapport. If your loved one seems truly unable to provide information, he may still be on the fringes, or he simply may be afraid to ask. Posing questions with open-mindedness and genuine curiosity—rather than a show-me attitude—will encourage him to seek answers. In his research, he may discover that he has been told a lie. If he knows he has been lied to, you might ask how he can trust what he's been told. By encouraging distrust of the cult hierarchy, you are helping the individual to think critically and independently. Encourage his integrity and self-trust.

Ask for examples and specific details

An important part of learning about your loved one's perspective, and ultimately helping him to expand it, is asking for details and specific

examples. If he says: *I'm having spiritual experiences all the time*, say, *Give me an example of a spiritual experience you had recently*. If he says, *I don't like everything about the group*, ask, *Like what, specifically?*

Use counter examples

If your loved one says: *My leader is a Prophet whose prophecies always come true*, ask, *You mean if we check all his prophecies, we'll find none that were wrong?*

If the comment is, *I know our group is God's because we are fruitful–we are growing so fast*, ask, *Does that mean that if you find a group that is growing faster, then God wants you to join that group instead?*

Find out what attracted him to the cult

Ask your loved one to describe step-by-step how he first heard about the organization and how he came to join. Review in detail just how and why he joined the group. For example, he may have been attracted to a group member who has long since gone. People often join for very personal reasons. That realization might help them see their involvement from a new perspective.

When first recruited, most cult members don't think they are making a lifetime commitment. They say to themselves, *I'm going to check this out for a little while, and see if it fits*. Family members and friends should not miss the opportunity to remind their loved one that, they were initially just investigating–not making a lifetime commitment.

Try asking:

- What was it that made you first pay attention to the group and take it seriously? What were your thoughts and feelings at the time? What were your experiences? Your expectations? What attracted you?
- Was there a person who was particularly influential? Did a social-service project or some other experience draw you in?
- Why did you think that becoming a member was an important thing for you to do, more important than your prior commitments?
- How long did it take for you to make a commitment? If it happened quickly, why? What factors do you think influenced

your joining?

A person in a science-fiction cult will give different answers to a person in a Bible cult. For example, a surviving member of Heaven's Gate claimed he didn't think of the group as a cult, but as a class for higher learning.

In a business cult, the motivating factor is typically money. If the cult member is involved with multilevel marketing, ask him if he looked into other ventures, such as an Internet or mail-order business. You want to respect his intention fulfill it by offering alternatives. Ask him if he has set a maximum length of time to be involved before deciding to change. Would it be three months, six months, or a year? If he fell into debt, at what point would he leave the group? Again, your aim is to help him think beyond his current experience.

A person who is being controlled by a therapist or is in a therapy cult wants to be healed. He might be indoctrinated to believe he has to keep re-experiencing his traumas until they are discharged like electricity from a battery. Tell him, *That's only one of several methods that can be used to deal with traumas. Are you open to learning a faster, easier technique, one that promotes choice as well as healing?* For example, some of the techniques mentioned in the phobia chapter can heal trauma faster and with less pain. We want to challenge the rigid, black-and-white model that says the cult's way is the only way to get better.

Ultimately, we want to use what the cult member says about the reasons he joined the group to help him reality-test: What was he promised would happen when he joined the group? How does it compare with what he is doing in the group today? With the information you have gained about his life in the group, you can ask specific questions:

- Did you know that you would be working in a fish factory sixteen hours a day?
- Did you expect to be sleeping only five hours a night and eating fast food?
- Did you ever dream that you would be discouraged from seeing your family and friends?

You do not want to assault your loved one with such questions, since that will make him defensive. Rather, use them over a series of mini-interactions, as your loved one reveals the details of his life. Pursued skillfully, this line of questioning can give him reasons to question his involvement with the group.

PLANT DOUBT WITH HYPOTHETICAL QUESTIONS

Ultimately, you want to motivate your loved one to leave the cult–which, for cult members, is unimaginable. To begin, ask him to imagine hypothetical circumstances under which he *might* leave. We ask *what-if* questions that present negative possibilities about the group. At first, your loved one may protest, *But I don't want to leave*. Tell him that you're not trying to take him away from the group–you just want to understand his commitment.

You might introduce an example from a different cult: *What if you knew someone in The Way International? People in The Way believe they're doing God's Will. They seem to know the Bible well. They quote Bible verses. Now, what if they discovered the leader's credentials weren't what he claims? He says he has a doctorate in theology, but what if, in fact, he bought a mail-order degree? I guess you would have to conclude the leader was misrepresenting his credentials. If you were in The Way, would that be enough to get you to leave? What if the leader then said, 'God wants us to lie.' Do you believe that God needs to lie, trick and manipulate?*

Another question you might ask is: *What if someone asked you to talk to a former member from a group some consider to be a cult?* It's a theoretical question–*what if* –which allows you to gain information without losing rapport with the cult member. If the cult member's response is *No, no way!* it's clearly not time to bring in an ex-member to speak with him. Instead, you might relate a story about a person you met or heard about who left another cult.

Former member: *When I was in the Moonies, I was in charge of a mall store where we sold lava lamps. We'd show the customer an expensive lamp, and then sell them a box containing a cheap imitation. I secretly bought a copy of* Combatting Cult Mind Control*. It got me to thinking. I decided it was against my integrity to sell these phony lamps, no matter what the cause.*

The underlying aim is to get your loved one to imagine circumstances under which he might leave the group. Rather than making statements and judgments, you suggest and elicit. You might talk about how difficult it was for this other person to leave because he had come to equate the group with

God's will. If your loved one can identify with an ex-member's story, he may begin to see that there is a way out.

At some point your loved one may become defensive and say, *I don't want to leave the group!* Remind him: *I'm asking hypothetically. If this happened, would you leave the group? Is there ever a legitimate reason to leave a group—any group? A fraternity, for example?* Open your discussion to all kinds of groups–political, psychotherapy, military, gangs, business groups.

- *What if you're in a gang that is planning to rob a bank? Is that a legitimate reason to leave? What if you're afraid the gang will pressure you or come after you? Would that be a legitimate reason to stay?*

- *Say you belonged to a therapy group that asked you to reveal intimate secrets confided to you by another member, would that be a legitimate reason to leave?*

Don't hesitate to use the word *legitimate*, although you might ask the cult member, *Who defines legitimate for you?* In a cult, there is never a legitimate reason to leave. Avoid talking directly about your loved one's group, but do build your case in the abstract by asking hypothetical questions.

Dealing with unfamiliar religious beliefs

Asking creative questions is a key to the success of the SIA, but to do so–and to evaluate answers–may be difficult if you have little understanding of the group's beliefs. If the cult member is in an eastern religious cult, it is imperative that you have at least a basic understanding of the history, beliefs, and practices of the original religion, whether it is Hindu, Buddhist, Taoist, or some other. Many eastern cults are split-offs—or hodgepodges—of mainstream religions. Your knowledge of these well-established religions may prove to be invaluable in helping your loved one see he is being misled.

If the family is religious, but of a different faith from the cult member, you would be wise to consider carefully the minister you enlist. For example, if an individual from a Catholic upbringing joined a fundamentalist Bible cult, it might be inappropriate to ask a Catholic priest to be involved, unless the cult member asks to speak with one.

Dealing with a proselytizing cult convert can be quite an ordeal, especially if it is someone you love. Proselytizing is a powerful method for reinforcing new beliefs and behavior in the person doing the proselytizing. For this reason, new members are told to recruit aggressively–and they may

well try to recruit Team members. Family and friends often do not know how to respond constructively when the cult member says, *You are going to hell!* They may be tempted to retort that he is the one possessed by Satan. Take the high road. Try saying, *I thought the Bible teaches love, not fear; forgiveness, not guilt-tripping; prayerful acceptance, not condemning judgment*. Establish a clear understanding of your own religious beliefs and learn how to communicate them effectively. Prepare yourself. If you are a devout Christian, don't argue the Bible. It will only result in a win-lose situation, and the relationship will suffer. Emphasize the mutual, positive points of your respective belief systems.

If you don't believe in God, don't lie. You can say, *If I did believe in a God, it would be a God of truth and free will. He or She would want us to live our lives with love and compassion*. If until now you haven't discussed such a possibility, your loved one may believe that positive changes are taking place because of God: *He is helping to heal the family*. Nurture this belief—but encourage also the idea that God transcends any one group's beliefs. By simply acknowledging the possibility of a higher power, you will have more leverage during future discussions of spiritual issues.

If you don't know *what* you believe, I strongly suggest finding out. Start with the Golden Rule, The Beatitudes or the Ten Commandments. Establish for yourself what you believe and why. If you are a complete skeptic regarding spiritual issues, be open to explain your point of view. Demonstrate open-mindedness and a willingness to consider alternative points of view. Talk respectfully with the cult member and, hopefully, he will return the favor.

Sowing more seeds of doubt

Bible-oriented cults often quote passages out of context, cite Greek texts inappropriately, or make inaccurate translations. In such cases, you might ask, *What if you found your Bible group leaders were making inaccurate translations of key passages? What if you realized the meaning of the Bible is different from the group's interpretation–would you leave?* If your loved one admits to some doubt, you might say, *I'd be happy to introduce you to people who can help to answer your questions about the Bible. Of course, you have to want to know those answers.*

Team members may also appeal to the cult member's sense of responsibility and personal ethics. Here you might say, *What if it turned out you belonged to a group whose leader is hurting people? Would you feel responsible for the people you influenced to become involved with the group?*

Don't make accusations, threats, or judgments, but do try to help your loved one see that there is a lot at stake. He could be wasting valuable time, compromising his integrity, recruiting innocent people, and raising money for a destructive organization.

A hypothetical question is better than a direct question such as, *Are you going to leave the group or not?* If the person says *No*, you may reinforce his devotion. Be creative. For example, you might say: *If the leader got up one day and said, 'I'm sorry. For the last 15 years, I've been telling you I'm God's enlightened being. I'm not! I realize I've been on a power trip. I'm disbanding the group.' What would you do? Would you believe him, or would you think he was testing you to see if you were faithful?*

CUSTOMIZE YOUR APPROACH

Thinkers, Feelers, Doers, Believers

A key to the success of your interactions will be to direct your questions and comments to your loved one's authentic identity. This requires knowing whether your loved one is a Thinker, Feeler, Doer, or Believer.[76] I was actually taught this model while a leader in the Moonies. Thinkers are analytic; Feelers value emotion over rational analysis; Doers are activists and workers; Believers value intuition and spiritual experience. Thinkers, Feelers, Doers, and Believers respond differently to questions. Some people belong in more than one of these categories. Decide which model is closest to the cult member, then concentrate on framing the questions for greatest effect.

Thinkers

When asked why they joined, Thinkers will be apt to say, *Because I've found the truth*, or *All of my questions about life have been answered*, or *I was impressed with the group's science conferences (with Nobel Laureates) and their claim to be bringing together science and religion*. To shift a Thinker's perspective, you might ask questions such as:

- What if you found out the Divine Principle isn't true?
- What if you found that a Bible quote was taken out of context by the group?
- What convinced you that this teaching—and no other—was the

highest truth?

- Have you gone back to the source material to validate or confirm the claims, quotes, contexts, and conclusions of the teaching?
- How would you recognize a higher truth? What would it sound like?
- What would you do if you found an even *higher* truth?
- What if you discovered that the teaching of your group has changed over time?
- What if you discovered that parts of the teaching are false?
- What are the arguments used by critics of your group?

Feelers

During my recruitment into the Moonies, I was love-bombed. My recruiters told me, *Ours is the one true family. We practice unconditional love—greater than any other group in history. We love you! Come join, and we'll love you forever*. The Feeler in me responded to their entreaties. (Of course, the group's love was conditional. If you questioned and decided to leave, you would not be worthy of love—on the contrary, you would be scorned and hated. Your true unconditional love, encouraging your loved one to act with integrity, being creative, learning, growing, and participating with family and friends may remind the authentic member of the cult's broken promises.

Some useful questions for Feelers:

- How did you know that this was the group for you?
- If your group teaches unconditional love, what happens to those who decide to leave? Would the group still love that person, and spend time with that person?
- What if your best friends in the group turn their backs on you because you asked a question that the leader criticizes or refuses to answer?
- What would you do if you saw someone suffering? Would you help them if they were not a member–or were a critic–of your group?
- What would you do if you felt anger toward another member of the group? Are you allowed to feel such emotions, or are you expected to suppress them? If you must suppress them, does your leader always suppress his anger?
- Do you ever see leaders being hypocritical? Does it upset you?
- Do you ever miss your friends, your family? How does it make you feel when you have to ask permission to see them?
- Do you ever feel like you need a vacation?

- Do you ever feel like just walking away?
- Do you ever feel that whatever you do, it's just not good enough?
- What would need to happen for you to feel that it is time for you to leave?

Doers

Doers are activists who like to perform deeds and achieve goals. If your loved one tells you that he is in the group because of its humanitarian work ask him for the specifics. Groups often have beautiful brochures but there is little or no real activity. If they are giving out free government food, but keeping most of it themselves, this is not humanitarianism. Doers don't like to work hard and find that they have accomplished nothing or, worse, actually undermined their original purpose. Here are some questions:

- How did you know that this group was one that would accomplish your goals?
- Did you check out the actual achievements of the group before you joined?
- Did you look into other organizations before deciding to commit to this one? Which ones?
- What were the specific goals of the group that first attracted you? What events or activities were you told would accomplish those aims? Were they achieved? Have you set a firm date in your mind for a specific goal or event to occur and, if not, will you leave?
- Would you do anything you were ordered to do by the group? What if it were something you didn't want to do—would you do it anyway? Why?
- What if you're asked to commit a crime?
- If you found a group that was doing more to accomplish your goals, would you consider joining them? What about the Red Cross? Amnesty International?
- What kind of experience would it take for you to know it was time to try something different?

Believers

Believers have a decidedly spiritual orientation. They are attuned to and seek out religious and spiritual experiences. Believers often get involved with a cult because they think they've had a message from the Divine. By the same token, they usually leave because of a spiritual missive. If your loved one tells you, *I joined because God told me to*, then you should get a

detailed description of how and when he received God's message. Questions for believers:

- When you first heard about the group, what was it that encouraged you to believe?
- Tell me all about your spiritual path. What were the most important spiritual experiences you've had in your life?
- How much exposure have you had to different spiritual teachers and traditions? Were you ever in a group where the leader turned out to be less than responsible? Have you ever spent time with a cult group? What do you think of the people you met in that group?
- What questions did you ask when you first considered getting involved?
- What would you do if you were praying tonight and you had a spiritual experience that clearly indicated you had to leave the group? What if God came to you in your prayers or meditations and said, "I want you to leave." Would you stay in the group, or would you follow God?

The cult member might reply, *Oh, God would never do that.* Try to steer him back to the hypothetical: *But what if He did? Where is your commitment? Is it to your friends, to your status in the group, or is it to God?*

Motivational styles

The way your loved one interacts with the world—the goals he sets, the decisions he makes—depends on his motivational style. If a person tends to seek out good or pleasant things in life, his motivational style is assertive–moving toward a positive. If he tends to avoid bad or painful things, his motivational style is defensive—moving away from a negative. Although people rely on both styles in different situations, they generally favor one style. Try to determine which motivational style your loved one used before becoming involved with the cult.

When you plan your approach, consider all of the variables. For example, a Thinker might say, *The teaching of my group is the highest truth*. If his motivational style is defensive, you can offer specific criteria: *A higher truth should not contain contradictions, and a higher truth should not change over time—as yours does*. You want to motivate him away from the negative (a false teaching). If his orientation is assertive, then offering him an even higher truth would work best.

If a Doer whose motivational style is assertive says, *Show me a better group—one that achieves more*—find out what matters to him. You might ask, *What are your criteria? Do you want to feed the hungry, clothe the poor, and visit the sick, as the Bible says? Have you ever investigated—in a concrete, practical way—any legitimate service organization?* If the Doer's orientation is to move away from a negative, you might find evidence of how his group is violating his ideals, and possibly hurting people, and bring it to his attention.

REALITY-TESTING: WIDEN THE INDIVIDUAL'S PERSPECTIVE & GIVE TOOLS

The way you look at things impacts the way you experience them. Rose-tinted glasses make everything appear rosy by filtering incoming information. Change the filter, and the information will be interpreted in a different way.

When people are subjected to mind control techniques, along with social influence processes, their mental filter becomes distorted. Events that have been calculated in advance are seen to be spontaneous. Mere coincidences are construed as revealing a cosmic message. Mundane experiences are attributed to a spiritual force. Members, reinforced by leaders and each other, come to see the world according to the cult perspective. In the Strategic Interactive Approach, we help the individual step out of that perspective and test his reality. We do that by getting him to see through our eyes and, more importantly, through the eyes of his authentic self. Of course, we do this in a non-confrontational, non-judgmental way so we don't alienate the programmed identity.

Clarifying intention, method, application, and consequence

Most cult members have noble *intentions*. Believers may want to achieve enlightenment, and Doers may want to make the world a better place. While these are honorable goals, cult members—despite their efforts—usually do not achieve what they intend to achieve. By asking your loved one to discuss his intentions, you help him develop a filter for evaluating his reality—in particular, his actions and their outcomes.

QUESTIONS TO TEST HIS REALITY

- On a scale of one to 10, how would you rate your leader's moral qualities? How does he compare to religious figures such as Jesus and the Buddha?
- On a scale of one to 10, how would you rate your commitment to the group when you first joined? How about now? How about five years from now?
- What is your view of people who are not members of your group?
- What is your view of the world outside of your group?
- How do you feel about your parents?
- How do you feel about your siblings?
- How do you feel about your other relatives?
- How do you feel about your old friends?
- What do you think about people who help get others out of cult situations? Why?
- Have you ever talked with someone who was helped to exit a cult involvement? Are you open to it? If not, why not?
- What is your attitude toward leaving the group?
- What did you say your attitude was toward former members? Why do you seem so willing to dismiss so many people without making an effort to get to know them first?

When a mother says, *My son tells me he has been meditating three hours, twice a day. Afterward, he feels spacey and has a headache,* the problem here is not with the son's intention, which is to achieve spiritual growth, but with his approach. Begin by acknowledging the good intent. In addition to building rapport, this validation will also move the cult member back in time: *What were your original intentions when you first became involved with the group?*

The next step is to draw his attention to *method*. If group doctrine says there is only one way to meditate–that is, by chanting for three hours, twice

a day—suggest alternatives like a breathing meditation, visualization, or walking.

The *application* is the second place to intercede: *How about meditating for a few less minutes each time? See how you feel.* It might be too much to suggest stopping the meditation altogether. This approach will allow your loved one to make small, gradual changes in his behavior without feeling that he's guilty of disobeying cult rules.

The bottom line is the *consequence*. Are the method and application producing positive results in your loved one's life? Encourage the cult member to ask questions: *What happens when you tell the leader that you are having headaches or muscle spasms?* A cult's answer might be, *Do what you are told!* or *Follow instructions!* or *You are 'unstressing'* or *You are liberating problems that have been held in your body. Keep meditating!* As long as the member is obedient, the symptoms get worse. Reality-test the cult's explanation for the consequences, and offer alternative explanations: *Maybe you're meditating for too many hours*. Or, *This type of meditation may not be healthy for your type of physiology. Maybe you need a different method.* Or, *How long will you continue to use this method, with these results, before you realize a change is in order?*

Therapeutic stories and metaphors

Stories and metaphors are compelling ways to communicate information and change attitudes and behavior. They are especially powerful in their ability to sidestep the cult's thought-stopping methods. One of the most effective therapeutic metaphors is that of the hero story: At the beginning, a person (the hero) is *stuck* but may not be aware of it. After a series of events, he becomes aware of the problem and seeks out new resources (people, information). These resources in turn provide new perspectives that lead to new behaviors. At the end, the hero is not only free from his problem, but leading a happier, healthier life.

This story-structure could be used again and again by different Team members who tell different stories. For example, someone who has stopped smoking cigarettes might begin telling his story by saying how he knew it was unhealthy, but felt *stuck* and hopeless. He could go on to describe how he found resources—a nicotine patch, a hypnotherapist, or a quit-smoking program—and saw new perspectives, and how he was able to find healthy substitutes for smoking, like therapeutic breathing techniques. Finally, he can tell the loved one how much better he feels and how happy he is to be back in control.

Use metaphors to draw parallels between cults and other destructive situations. A powerful metaphor for the cult experience is that of an abusive relationship. The abuse might be psychological, physical, or both. Here, you find an example of an unhealthy relationship in your past and talk about it in a way that helps the cult member draw connections to his own situation. If you can't think of a personal example, describe someone you know or have heard about who suffered from battered wife syndrome. Talk about how people warned her of her husband's temper; how she was unable to see his flaws; how he controlled her with fear, guilt, and pain; how he isolated her from family and friends and made her dependent; and how she ultimately found help and escaped from the relationship.

Other therapeutic metaphors may seem less relevant but, if told properly, can be effective. For instance, you might talk about becoming lost in a forest while on a hiking trip with friends. Describe how you came to realize that you were lost and how you climbed a tree to get a better perspective of where you were. You might also describe how you built a fire and put wet leaves on it to make a smoke signal. Another medium for therapeutic metaphors is movies. Two of my favorites are *The Truman Show* with Jim Carrey and a 1983 movie with Walter Matthau and Robin Williams called *The Survivors*. In *The Truman Show*, Jim Carrey's character chooses personal freedom at the end, rather than living an illusion. In *The Survivors,* Robin Williams' character is recruited into a survivalist cult; in the end he realizes the leader is a phony who wants to get rich off of his followers. There are many other wonderful movies that can be very helpful too.

Switching roles

Switching roles can open new perspectives, improve communication, and create a more intimate relationship. Unlike role-playing, where you are stepping into the cult member's shoes, you are asking him to step into *your* shoes so that he will see from your perspective. One strategy is to respond to a question with a question: The cult member: *How do you feel about my joining the group?* His stepfather might reply: *If you were me, how do you think I would feel?*

This role-switching technique can cause the cult member to adopt his stepfather's perspective. Then you must be prepared to reciprocate. In fact, you might explicitly ask your loved one to switch roles with you. Can you defend his position on a particular subject—for example, his love for his leader—as if it were your own? Team members who cannot adopt the perspective of the cult member should spend more time getting to understand him better. Ask more questions; learn about his world.

You might try practicing this technique with another Team member. In the following exercise, I took the mother's position and the mother took her daughter's, as a way of preparing for an actual role-switch.

SH: (as the mother): *Kristi, I wonder how you can be so willing to allow your guru to decide whether you can visit us when you've always taken such pleasure in making up your own mind, even going against authority.*

Mother (as daughter): *She'd say, 'My guru has shown me that my rebelliousness was just a way of trying to control things that are out of my control. Mom, when will you let go and just accept things?'*

SH: (as mother making role switch): *I'll do my best to accept things, but you also need to step into my shoes. How would you feel if your beautiful spirited daughter whom you loved, and whose company you enjoyed so much, had to ask someone else whether she could even see you?*

In asking such a question, your aim is to not only elicit the authentic identity, but also to get the loved one to go inside; to get in touch with her own feelings as a way of getting in touch with yours. The response could vary, depending on whether she is in cult or in authentic mode.

Cult identity: *I'd just accept it.*

Authentic identity: *Hmm . . . that's a tough one.*

Mother: *So then what would I say?*

SH: Try this (as mother)*: I want you to know how much I respect you. I hope you respect me too. If the leader of your group is who he says he is–and if the group's teachings are valid–then I, too, will see the light. Share with me and teach me–I want to understand you and your group. If the leader proves to be untrustworthy, then let's try to take what we've learned and move forward.*

As she responds, show that you are listening. Say, *So what I hear you saying is* . . . then repeat what she just said, in your own words—listen actively. Be genuinely, sincerely interested. Focus on the member, rather than any point you might want to make. Let her talk about herself. Let her tell you what she likes about being in the group. Remember, both identities (programmed and authentic) want your love and approval.

The elitist mindset

Cult members have been indoctrinated to believe the outside world is hostile, hateful, and dangerous. They are often treated as if they were misfits and idiots by other people. When I was in the Moonies, I was punched and spat on by people on the street. I once had beer thrown at me. My commitment to the group was intensified by what I experienced as persecution. One hot day, as I was selling flowers on a New York city street corner, a man offered to buy me a cold drink. My cult mentality was challenged as I experienced this person's kindness and generosity.

You can show your loved one that people in the outside world can be kind and considerate. Treat people respectfully and compassionately, especially members of the group. They are someone else's children, siblings, or parents.

In some cults, members are told that the family is against them or trying to control them. You can challenge that belief by showing that you want your loved one to think independently and make his own decisions. Find ways to convey the message that you respect his positive intentions and desires, that your concerns are directed at the way the leader is acting or how the group is using its members. By supporting the positive intentions, you ally yourself with your loved one's real self.

If the cult member believes he will be kidnapped and tortured by deprogrammers, then he needs to be reassured that it will not happen. You might ask your loved one, *What do we need to do to show you that we'll protect you? That we'll stand up for your right to be an individual? That we'll protect your right to do what you think is best for yourself*? Don't plant negative ideas by saying, *We promise we won't let anyone kidnap or torture you.* Plant positive ideas instead: *We're on your side, and we will protect you from anyone trying to force you to do something against your will.*

If the cult member believes people leave the group because they are weak, possessed, sinful, or brainwashed, the most powerful antidote is meeting happy, well-adjusted former members. As a former member, I tell the person, *I left the group because of my integrity–I couldn't go on deceiving and being deceived. I'm happier now, and I feel closer to God than when I was in the organization. I also understand the Bible better than when I was in the group.* It is very persuasive to meet a former member who is happy and fulfilled. It undermines the phobia indoctrination.

Examining the claims

Cults tend to make extraordinary claims for their leaders, doctrines, and organization. But the burden of proof lies with them–not with ex-members and critics. In other words, they must prove they are superior. We do not have to disprove their claims.

The most effective response is to point out that there are hundreds, perhaps thousands, of people claiming to be Messiahs, Perfect Masters, or Avatars. We need to step back and examine these claims. If they turn out to be true, the group will be there tomorrow, next week, next month, next year.

Morality systems based on absolute principles inevitably reach a point where principles contradict each other. Cult doctrine is based on absolute principles. It is instructive to discover the inherent contradictions. A productive strategy is to use cult ideologies and behaviors to see if the group practices its own ideals.

For example, Scientology has some teachings that can orient a member in a healthy direction. In one of Hubbard's heavily promoted lectures, the cult's creator describes Scientology as *The Road to Truth*, and says, essentially, that true steps must always be taken when seeking the truth. Jon Atack, author of *A Piece of Blue Sky*[77], would take an audiotape of this lecture with him when helping members re-evaluate their involvement. Once the member had agreed that this teaching was essential, Atack would point out contradictions and deceptions made by the cult's leader. Scientology claims to be scientific, so any tenet can be questioned. Science demands that truths be demonstrable.

Cults often say one thing and practice another. If they promise that members can raise their IQs, ask for the scientific proof. If they promise people can move objects with their thoughts, have them demonstrate.

Paradox

Paradox is a technique in which you encourage the cult member to do something that he is already doing. It must be used sparingly and cautiously; otherwise you may seem to be approving of his cult membership. I used paradox when I said to a client, *I think you should move to the headquarters to be closer to the guru so you can see what goes on at the heart of the group.* This suggestion might sound shocking to the cult member and the family. However, I've found some people need to get *more* involved so they experience the abuses of the cult.

Sometimes a loved one needs to experience firsthand the discrepancy

between his idealistic beliefs and the reality of the cult. Using paradox can empower him to re-evaluate his cult involvement. Not all cases call for the use of paradox and, in fact, some may be damaged by the technique. It must be applied carefully.

The Strategic Interactive Approach is designed to promote gradual self-directed, positive change over time through a series of mini-interactions. Sometimes the cult member will make the decision to walk away after only a few mini-interactions, but this is not always the case. If a formal intervention is necessary, your hard work will not have been in vain. From the beginning, SIA Team members have been planting seeds. During an intervention, you build on all of your previous efforts to see these seeds come to fruition.

SUMMARY:

The two–day preparation meeting is a chance for all key family members, friends and other resource people, like former members to come together and truly become a team while learning the essentials.

As we have seen, the Strategic Interactive Approach is a series of mini-interactions, phone calls, letters, visits to help open your loved one's mind to points of view beyond the indoctrinated perspective, by moving your loved one through a series of steps.

Confrontation is the least effective way to get cult members to talk about their involvement. Ask questions from a curious, yet concerned posture. Try to "step into the shoes" of the person.

It is initially unimaginable for cult members to conceive of leaving their cult. So begin by asking them to imagine hypothetical circumstances under which they *might* leave.

The Strategic Interactive Approach helps a cult member step out of the cult perspective and test its reality and see through the eyes of his authentic self.

Chapter 12

Planning and Holding an Intervention

The main focus of the Strategic Intervention is to inspire the family and other Team members to do mini-interactions, building rapport and trust and "tuning in" to help the loved one. It is hoped that the individual will want to seek out information—talk with former members, do research on the Internet and, ideally meet qualified professionals. It would be fantastic if your loved one simply decided to leave the group after a series of successful mini-interactions, leaving no need for a formal intervention, and this does sometimes happen.

Sometimes the decision to leave happens quite dramatically. In one family whose daughter was involved with the Moonies, the sister was invited to attend a cult lecture. I educated her about the group, told her about the alleged sexual improprieties and cocaine addiction of Moon's son and suggested questions to ask her sister. After hearing what the sister had to say, the young woman became disillusioned with the group and walked out. Afterward, she met with me and, eventually, received counseling.

Some cult members need more time before making the decision to leave. One woman was preparing to join a strange UFO channeling cult whose leaders claimed to be from the eighth dimension. A friend of hers asked my opinion of a videotape made by the group of one of their meetings. I found it both hypnotic and manipulative. He asked if I would meet with her, and introduced me as his friend. I told her about my own experiences with the Moonies, and used some of the SIA techniques detailed in the previous chapter. I did my best to plant some seeds for her to keep her eyes and mind open. She did move in with the group but, within two months, she walked out and returned to her previous life.

Some members may be kicked out of a cult because of their questioning attitude, or because they are seen as a liability. I worked on a Transcendental Meditation (TM) case in which a young man living in the ashram was losing weight and acting oddly. His family, on my urging, pressured one of the local leaders to allow a medical examination. The physician saw reason to be concerned about the young man's health. Because the group was afraid of attracting bad publicity—or a lawsuit—they told the young man to leave the ashram and return home until he was well again.

Even after cult members leave the group, there is still work that needs to be done. They may break away but still be under the cult's influence. Often they continue to communicate with other cult members and ex-members. These people may need counseling to help them deal with psychological and social issues.

Difficult cases

After a series of mini-interactions, your loved one may still be sitting on the fence. I once helped a Jehovah's Witness who realized there were problems with the WatchTower Society, but was unable to leave the group. Since he did not yet have the personal resources to make a move, I recommended that we do an intervention. First, we located a former member and friend who had left a year earlier. Then the cult member's brother invited him—along with the ex-member—to lunch. The former member discussed some material from my freedomofmind.com website and introduced the idea of a meeting with me. Over a period of a few days, we were able to answer his questions, watch videotapes, and go over the paradigm of destructive influence. He decided to leave the group.

It is also possible that, after months of work, your loved one is completely resistant to further discussion. Perhaps you've asked him to read critical literature about his group, speak with a former member, or meet with someone like me, and he refused. If after many interactions your loved one is still firmly entrenched in the group, you may want to consider a formal, three-day intervention. This decision should be made very thoughtfully because, if it goes well, it will be wonderful. But, if it doesn't go well and the individual does not agree to stay and listen and learn, it can cause major rapport and trust issues. Interventions should only be attempted when there is a pressing reason to do them and should be done with professional consultation.

WHAT IS AN INTERVENTION?

An intervention is a project and a major experience for all concerned, but especially for the individual who is deeply involved. It has a beginning, middle, and end but needs to be customized to be maximally effective for the individual. Team members—family, friends, former members, possibly clergy—are introduced to the individual not all at once, but according to a plan (which often changes to fit the situation). During an intervention, people take time off from work, put their life on hold, and let the cult member know that he is important and that there is a problem. Adding to the

feeling of importance—sometimes powerfully—is the fact that people may travel long distances to participate. Perhaps a cousin is arriving from South America, or a grandmother is flying cross-country. Former members are coming from distant locations to speak with the individual.

People are often tempted to rush into an intervention before they have exhausted the strategy of mini-interactions. Difficult cases are even more so if there has been little previous communication. Mini-interactions lay the groundwork that allows a family member to say, *I've really tried to understand you. Now I need your help. I really need to hear you talk with other who understand the issues so that I can better understand other perspectives. If the group is really legitimate, it will stand up to scrutiny. Let's hear out people who have concerns, hear what they have to say, and evaluate it.*

An SIA intervention can sometimes be like a little like trying to help an alcoholic who is in denial. However, the goal is not to force your loved one to leave the group but to provide information and perspectives that were not previously available to him; to promote informed choice; to enable him to re-evaluate his commitment and make his own decision. You should not attempt an intervention without guidance from a professional who has the necessary skills, information, and objectivity to guide the process. You should also be careful to check out the *bona fides* of that expert before proceeding.

PLANNING THE INTERVENTION

In order for an intervention to go smoothly it is important to take the process one step at a time. My experience is that it is very difficult, to almost impossible, for inexperienced people to plan and implement a successful intervention, let alone a difficult one. As we review the process, I think you will see the crucial advantages of working with an experienced consultant.

The process needs to be paced, otherwise, the team may become overwhelmed by the task and delay or give up altogether. Using the information gathered by Team members during mini-interactions, the intervention will be planned as a series of small, manageable steps. Careful attention is paid to positive and negative consequences (regarding Team members and location) and planned actions (who will say what and when). Imagine the best, worst, and most likely scenarios.

The Intervention Team

The first step is to work with a person experienced in interventions (the person I will call an FOM consultant) until you are sure that you understand the process. Different people are singled out and are usually given specific assignments and the necessary techniques and strategies to carry out. This process allows you time to evaluate how comfortable you feel with the consultant you've chosen and to get answers to any concerns. Only form an intervention team when you are sure you grasp the plan and feel sure it is the best way to help your loved one.

The Intervention Team will be composed of people who are most significant to the cult member and who will be most effective in communicating with him. When planning an intervention, I customize, rather than taking a cookie-cutter approach, because what works terrifically for one case could well be a disaster for another. This is an area where a consultant experienced in interventions has a huge advantage because they have many past situations to draw from.

I take what I know of the loved one and try to put myself into his shoes and imagine what kind of intervention would motivate me, engage me, and make me want to participate. In some cases, it is good to have a lot of loving family members in the room. In other cases, it is best to keep it small and intimate. Sometimes it may be most effective to have the intervention initiated by a sibling and not have the parents present. Perhaps a favorite aunt or best friend should take the lead. Whoever has the strongest relationship with the member.

Generally, you want your experienced consultant to lead the intervention. Theory and research help prepare team members, but the leader needs responses honed from repeated experience. Generally, the best leaders are former cult members who have also had formal training and whose interests will help them relate to your loved one's pre-cult self. If the cult member used to play basketball, a basketball lover would have some rapport with the pre-cult self. If the cult member loves blues music, an ex-member who plays blues guitar would be a good match. Ask yourself if this person can win rapport and respect from the cult member. But it's rarely worth trading off past experience just to gain other commonalities.

Finding a former member who knew your loved one in the cult would be an invaluable resource. There are many ways to locate former members but you must be extremely careful to screen. One of the advantages of working with FOM is that we have established relationships with ex members who have been vetted for suitability to participate in interventions. If you kept a record of the cult members you've met or spoken with since your loved one joined, you might be able to find out if they are still in the

group. If there is a website run by former members, email them and ask if they can help locate people to help you. Often it is best to ask FOM to do the searching, or a Private Investigator, to minimize the possibility that the group will find out that you are trying to help one of their members.

Arrange a time and place

You and your consultant will need to identify potential times and places for doing the intervention. You will need to consider reasons to get your loved one physically away from the group for an extended period—for example, grandmother's eightieth birthday party, or the annual family reunion—and consider holding an intervention before or after the event. An intervention during the first visit home is usually discouraged because the member will be on guard. Make that visit a wonderful experience so they will want to come home again.

If the cult member is about to be married, it is usually not the time to try an intervention—unless it is an arranged marriage and you know your loved one doesn't really want to be with the person. Finding the most effective time for an intervention is key. Ideally, it should be timed after a set of successful mini-interactions and after the three-step phobia intervention have been implemented though, in truly difficult cases, this may not be possible.

There should be positive, or at least neutral, associations with the location. A place that is unfamiliar, and not easily accessible to the cult is best. The place should be comfortable and private. Lighting should be comfortable, and there should be a minimum of noise and distractions (like ringing telephones, traffic noise, barking dogs, or crying babies).

APPROACH YOUR LOVED ONE

After learning how to do mini-interactions and trying a number of them, it will be easier to decide with your consultant how to approach your loved one. The consultant will most probably suggest the most honest and direct approach and encourage family members to discuss their concerns with the cult member. The person with the most trust, respect, and emotional clout should be the person to ask the cult member.

When approached in such an open, non-threatening way, by a non-authoritarian figure, the cult member should feel more in control. The downside is that the cult may do everything in its power to stop this meeting from happening. They might agree to let the member attend the meeting but

insist that a cult sub-leader be present. This is not recommended, but if it becomes a point of negotiation, it is a step in the right direction. However, you want your loved one to think for himself, and that is less likely to happen if someone from the group is there. Here again, an experienced consultant will be able to help you sort through the options and plan the best strategy.

As soon as your loved one agrees to a meeting, the time and place will be established. It will be important to tell him the fact that, if he tells the group, they will likely pressure him not to attend or find some last-minute excuse to keep him from attending. Ask for a commitment that he will fulfill the agreement, no matter what the group says. Rehearse with him possible responses to cult pressure, and help him to imagine the best possible, worst possible, and most likely outcomes. Ideally, he will decide not to tell them, but if he is confronted, he will know how to respond. Solidify the commitment with a handshake.

The alternative and more traditional approach is to have the consultant and rest of the team ready and waiting nearby when you ask the cult member for consent. Such an approach is sometimes the only viable way to proceed. The most destructive cults will never allow a member to attend such a meeting.

You will be extensively coached to speak carefully when you present the plan to your loved one. As always, your attitude needs to be sincere and conversational. Talk about the cult involvement as a family problem. Acknowledge your loved one's good intentions. Then express your concern. If he is upset that you didn't tell him in advance, acknowledge that he has the right to be upset. Give him time to think and digest the situation. If he is angry, then apologize and ask for forgiveness. Explain that you trust him, but you are cautious about the group and the way it seems to exert control. Tell him that you want to give him the opportunity to think for himself, and ask him, *If we had called last week and told you what we wanted, would you even be here now?* If he says yes, then apologize and say you miscalculated. Tell him that you are glad he is independent and able to be open-minded.

Customize the approach

If your loved one is a leader or sub-leader, he may be proud of his position and confident that the cult is honorable and legitimate. In such situations, I find that a well–timed challenge can be fruitful. Say: *If you are a responsible leader and believe in the group, then you should know your critics' issues and be able to refute them. Many people look up to you for*

guidance, and I am sure you will be able to articulate the group point of view effectively.

Or, you've been telling me for 10 years that you're not under the group's influence. I am asking you to prove it. Meet with these people. Give us three days. Sit, listen, talk, and question. I really want to hear you and them discussing the pros and cons.

Rank-and-file members are typically more submissive and may respond better to an authority figure such as a parent or older sibling. You can do some gentle questioning that appears to defer to cult authority: *I'm confused. On the one hand, I have many concerns about your well-being. On the other hand, you seem convinced that you've made your own decision and that it was the right one. Help me understand what's going on.*

Or, *Who can I speak with to get permission for you to come home for a visit?*

A common strategy for dealing with a cult member who believes his group has the one truth is to present yourself as a potential convert: *Who knows? Maybe I will join too because it could mean my salvation.* If he thinks that you might be saved, a door may be left open. Although it is tempting to express distaste for the cult, try not to close the door with angry declarations, like *There's not a chance in a million years that I will ever join your group.* By stating such absolutes, you risk losing the rapport and trust you may have established.

You can also appeal to your loved one on a more personal level. You might say, *If you love us, even if you think we're totally off-base, just do it anyway to allay our fears*. Or, you might negotiate a *quid pro quo* agreement. For example, if he asks if you could help him buy a car, you might say you would consider it if he would do something for you.

Telephone issues

You should also prepare yourself for the possibility that your loved one will want to call the cult or receive texts or phone calls from other cult members. I've seen interventions fall apart when the cult leader or sub-leader calls and says, *You're with the Devil. Get out of there! No matter what, don't listen to what they say!* Such declarations can make cult members so afraid that they pack up and walk out of the door.

You don't want to make the cult member feel uncomfortable, so you should not forbid him to make or receive phone calls. You can talk with him in advance. Help him to consider what the cult's response might be if he

tells them about your request, and ask him to please take this time away from the group to think. It is imperative that you rehearse with him what he will say to the cult, possibly by having a former member (or some other team member) role-play what the cult member should say. If he insists on calling, encourage him to limit the conversation. He might say, *I'm fine. I'll call you in a few days.* You might suggest that a family member call and leave a message for him. Remember, the telephone line is his link to the cult and to the cult's perspective. You should do everything you can to weaken that link.

Seize—or create—the moment

If after repeated requests your loved one resists your efforts, you may have to actively create the conditions for an intervention. One of the most effective ways to reach a cult member is to find a former member of the group who was his friend, and have that person suggest a meeting. Success depends on several factors; who is asking, how the suggestion is made, as well as timing. Your loved one may have refused in the past, but a *no* today does not necessarily mean eternal *no*. If it had been a different person asking, in a different tone of voice, on a different day, the answer might have been *yes*.

Another strategy is to ask the cult member to come home to do an intervention with another family member. I have seen families with loved ones in two different cults carry out successful interventions with both. In such situations, you might say, *Jenny's in trouble. As you know she is involved with this guru, and she is about to move to India. Would you come and talk with her?* You can also ask a cult member to help with a drug or alcoholism intervention: *Dad's got a drinking problem. We need to do an intervention. Would you come home and help?*

Sometimes helping a cult member to think for himself is achieved by time away from the group. Long enough for the authentic self to come up for air. Do everything in your power to help your loved one take a break from the cult, and you may just be amazed at what happens.

Sally and Greg

Felicia and Larry Michaels were divorced the year after she became a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses. Larry loved Felicia but could not deal with her sudden personality change. She had become a religious fanatic. She was awarded custody of their two small children, Greg and Sally. Years later, when he realized it was a destructive cult, Larry asked me to help plan

an intervention with his children. I advised him to begin by approaching his 14-year-old son, Greg.

Larry asked Greg to join him on a five–day fishing trip in Canada, which we hoped would remind Greg of their old life together. While they fished, Larry talked about the good times they had, and coaxed the pre-cult Greg to express himself. Once Larry felt he had achieved an adequate level of rapport and trust, he was able to present hundreds of pages of original WatchTower documents that he had photocopied. His son was so moved by his effort that, after the trip, he agreed to meet with former members. Soon after, he made the decision to leave the group.

We started making plans to help Sally. It took months for Greg to build bridges with his mother and sister (anyone who leaves the Jehovah's Witnesses is viewed as under Satan's control). We discussed possible locations for the intervention. The goal was to get Sally as far away as possible from cult influence. Larry decided to invite Greg and Sally to Jamaica. I recommended an ex-member named Rebecca to help with the intervention. Rebecca is a sweet, compassionate person and a devout Christian who is comfortable talking about her faith.

Sally agreed to the trip. When she arrived, she was asked by her father to meet with me. She refused. While Larry, Greg and I discussed alternative strategies, Rebecca sat by the pool. To her surprise, Sally sat down next to her. A conversation ensued, and Sally began proselytizing. Rebecca listened quietly for a few minutes. Then she remarked, "These things that you're saying sound familiar to me. You see, I was involved with a group similar to yours when I was your age." Rebecca's loving manner reached Sally. They talked for hours. That evening, Sally agreed to meet with me, which ultimately led to a successful intervention. Within a year of Sally's decision to leave the Witnesses's, Felicia also left.

FAMILY COUNSELING AS A FOCAL POINT

Unlike exit counseling, the Strategic Interactive Approach can sometimes use "family counseling" or use an FOM consultant to do mediation to bring the cult member closer to other family members. By focusing on healing and improving communication within the entire family, we take pressure off the cult member. A traditional family counseling session is held at the therapist's office for one or two hours. In the SIA intervention, we hold sessions anywhere *but* an office, and often for hours at a time. Loved ones who have participated in extended cult workshops are usually open to a multiple-day intervention.

They may be especially motivated to attend if the intervention is presented to them as a time to work on the family's problems. Once there is a level of trust established, they can identify the loved one's cult involvement as one of the issues at hand.

When participating in counseling sessions at home, I am able to understand the family better by observing the home environment. Is the house orderly or chaotic? What are the decorations like? Who are the people in the photographs? What do these photographs tell me? For example, if photos of the father always show him holding the same one of his three daughters, I might assume he has a closer relationship with that daughter. Family members have their own positive and negative associations with the home environment. If the cult member or an important Team member has particularly negative associations with their home, the intervention should probably be held somewhere else–perhaps at a neighbor's or close friend's house.

During an SIA family counseling session, I ask the cult member a series of questions to help me understand his perspective: *What was it like growing up in your family? How did you feel about your father? Your mother? Your brother?* In addition to identifying personal family concerns, I want to develop rapport and to elicit the pre-cult self.

My aim is to help the loved one shift his point of view. If the cult member mentions a specific family problem, he is being drawn out of the cult mentality and into the family system. For example, a member might tell her father, "Dad, you've been going to a shrink for 16 years to deal with your shyness, and you're just as shy today as you were when you started." For the father, this is an opportunity to model positive change by breaking out of his rut. He might admit that he is stuck and wants to change his behavior: "You're right. What I've been doing isn't working, so maybe I should see someone else, and try something different."

Another issue that often comes up during counseling is conflict over spirituality. For example, a member of a political cult may complain that his Catholic parents are too rigid in their beliefs. If the family is agnostic, a religious cult member may say that they should have more faith. I work to promote the idea that we all have the right to believe different things. However, it helps to be able to step into each other's shoes. Discussing within the family how the group uses destructive influence to promote beliefs can encourage the cult member to reality-test. The point is not to focus so much on the beliefs, themselves, but on the way the group exploits the four components of the BITE model. Ideally, both cult member and family will be motivated to find common areas of

agreement and to accept one another.

Take regular breaks. This gives the cult member time to take a walk, reflect or pray alone or with the family. I have found some of the most significant conversations take place during the breaks. You should also make sure that nourishing snacks and beverages are available.

THE THREE-DAY INTERVENTION

Although there is no such thing as a typical SIA intervention, it is helpful when planning an intervention to think in terms of the three–day model. To illustrate this model, I will describe a case that is representative of my approach.

A young member (we'll call her Jan) of a yoga-guru cult had been through very intense destructive influence–from sleep deprivation to immersion in freezing cold water, extensive sauna baths, and long periods of meditation and chanting. After she had been involved for over a year, her family flew to California to visit her. There, they were able to befriend the leader and obtain permission for Jan to come back east for a visit to collect some trust money. They asked me to help plan an intervention.

As it turned out, the guru had been kicked out of another state where he had used a different name. I was able to track down more information about him and learned that he was using some of the women as prostitutes to raise money for the group. Of course, the members of Jan's family were extremely concerned, and wanted to act immediately. Fortunately, through mini-interactions, they had planted enough seeds in her mind that she was willing to meet with me.

Day One

Typically, most of day one is spent building rapport and trust, gathering information, getting everyone to connect as much as possible with the cult member, and laying the groundwork for the next two days. In some cases, we will begin general discussions of destructive influence and cults. We may watch videotapes of programs on social influence, such as Dr. Philip Zimbardo's "Discovering Psychology," or social psychology experiments like the Milgram, Asch, or the Stanford 'prison' experiments. Dr. Zimbardo's Heroic Imagination Project (heroicimagination.org) has a wonderful video library of clips. I usually share aspects of my own cult involvement, and try to highlight those points that are most relevant to my client.

Because the first full day of Jan's intervention involved family counseling, she really felt she was being heard. We took turns listening as Jan and her family talked about their feelings, and then moved on to a few structured exercises. For example, I asked each person to say three things they liked about each other, as well as three things they would like to change. I asked to meet with each family member for a few minutes alone. When it came to Jan's turn, we wound up spending a long time, which allowed me to gain her trust. She felt that I understood her and could advocate for her at times when confronting family difficulties.

Day Two

Day two, we delve more deeply into the cult influence. If the three-part phobia cure has not been accomplished, I talk about phobias and do a phobia intervention with the person. I usually go into greater detail about my own cult experience, and ask probing questions about the person's experience with his group. This is a good time to introduce a former member of the group. If I've contacted any experts—such as a theologian, a Buddhist teacher or scholar, or a rabbi—I also try to bring them in on day two, if not sooner.

In Jan's case, I coached the family to start raising some of their questions and concerns on day two. Later, I asked to speak again with her privately, where she might feel more comfortable talking about her experiences. I also addressed her phobias. For Jan, day two marked the transition from family counseling to educational cult counseling. I showed her videotapes of other guru cults, and helped her understand how the practice of meditation had made her more susceptible to cult beliefs.

Day Three

On day three, we pursue more in–depth discussions about the specific beliefs of the group, such as theological questions. Day three builds on the progress made in the previous two days. Hopefully, by this time, the person is making important connections, and asking direct questions about his own group.

Since I had done research on the leader of Jan's group, I was able to present her with information that disturbed her greatly. It turned out that Jan had not yet been asked to perform any sexual activities, but probably would been at a future time. She was aware that some of the women in the group spent time at a massage parlor, but the revelation of her leader's prostitution ring was nevertheless quite shocking to her. At the end of the third day,

Jan's family was overjoyed when she announced that she had decided to stay home and receive additional follow-up counseling.

ALTERNATIVE STRATEGIES

It is possible that you are dealing with a situation in which the SIA, as I've described it, is unworkable. The cult member may be unreachable or unresponsive to the family's appeals. The family might be fragmented, and some family members may not be able to regain the trust of the cult member. But if your efforts are not working, there are other options.

To begin with, you can organize a support system of families with loved ones in the same group. If the cult owns a business, as did Heaven's Gate, you might be advised to contact non-cult personnel in the business and conduct mini-interactions to educate them about the group and enlist their help. You can work with ex-members to create a cult awareness action group in your city, if one does not already exist.

You can also use the media to draw public attention to the group's activities. Cult leaders often go to great lengths to create a positive image of the group. When Cathryn Mazer's family appeared at the Moonie center to talk to their daughter, accompanied by cameras from NBC's *The Today Show*, the cult began paying attention to their requests. The producer interviewed Cathryn, and it was clear that she was not exercising her free will. *The Today Show* decided to do a show featuring the family's plight and asked me to appear in the segment with the president of the American Unification Church. The resulting show was a public relations nightmare for the cult. The public saw a family torn apart by a so-called religious group—one spouting so-called family values—that would not allow Cathryn to see her own brother.

After the show, the family was contacted by the producer of another national television show who wanted to do a segment. I encouraged Cathryn's family to play hardball. I suggested they call the Moon leader they were dealing with and tell him about the invitation. I told them to tell the Moonies that if Cathryn were immediately put on a plane and sent home, the family wouldn't do the show. In the meantime, Cathryn was very upset about being kept from her family. She was sent home. She agreed to counseling, and went on *The Today Show* several months later–vibrant and articulate as she explained what had happened to her and warned the public about the dangers of cults. She ended her appearance with an appeal to family members to *never lose hope*.

Her family had broken new ground. They showed how the media could

be used to facilitate a rescue. Our strategy worked because the media were willing to do the proper research, find the right personnel, and dramatically portray the cult influence on Cathryn and her family. A half-hearted effort by a less important and popular show probably would not have worked. Also, it is important to note that the Moonies were vulnerable to this approach because of their high profile as publishers of the *Washington Times* newspaper and owners of the University of Bridgeport, Connecticut. A small, unknown cult might not feel they had as much to lose from bad publicity.

When communication is cut off, some families have created Web pages to publicize information about their loved ones. This is most effective when the page contains photographs of family, friends, pets, and home, and the message is positive: *We love you. We miss you. Please call, write a letter or an e-mail. We want to know you're safe*. Such a website can alert other cult watchers who might be helpful.

If you decide to design your own Web page, be careful not to merely attack the group. Even when a family member or friend has been critical for years, toning it down and taking a balanced approach will be most effective. Recently, a cult member's daughter insisted on posting a Web page to expose the group's practices. I told her to start with a smiling picture of her mother and herself, and tell her story in a calm, rational way: *I love my Mom. I haven't seen her since last year. She has been told that she can't leave the group; that if she leaves, she will die. This is an example of phobia programming.*

FINANCIAL ISSUES

The costs associated with helping a loved one in a cult can add up quickly, and money often becomes an obstacle. Although financing an intervention may seem difficult, there is usually a way to make it possible.

A cult member's father once told me that the cost of an intervention effort is worth at least the price of tuition for a year of college. To many families, it makes sense to use money set aside for college, especially when a cult member has dropped out of school to follow the group. Creativity and persistence help families find ways to fund an intervention. It might mean tracking down lost family members or friends who are willing to help (and convincing them that the person is under the influence of the cult). In certain cases, consultants are willing to negotiate flexible payment terms or lowered fees. In recent years, my *pro bono* efforts have gone primarily to counseling cult walk–outs who have neither money nor family.

Money is often a loaded subject for cult members as well as for ex-members. In fact, some ex-members feel tremendous guilt about the money their family has spent to help them. Some insist on repaying the family for the cost of the intervention. Nevertheless, family members are best advised to avoid discussing financial issues around the cult member. Such discussions can lead him to one of two conclusions. Either, *The family is materialistic, and only cares about money,* or *That's too much money, so I'll save them the expense by declining the invitation.* If your loved one asks about the cost, respectfully say that money is not the issue: *We're not worried about that. We just care about you.*

AFTER THE INTERVENTION

Not every intervention has a happy ending. Some cases take a long time to untangle. In the event that the person says he wishes to remain in the group, family members should express their disappointment, but be encouraged that they have done what they could. Progress has been achieved. If the cult member wants time and needs distance to reflect, try to maintain meaningful communication (telephone, letters, and visits), and continue building the relationship. Discuss the possibility that the cult might see him as a hero for returning, and distort what happened to make it seem that the intervention was involuntary and coercive. Ask him to always remember what really happened, rather than accepting the group's version.

If your loved one decides to leave the group, there is still a lot of work to be done. Physically leaving a cult does not necessarily resolve all of a person's issues. Former cult members need time to readjust to life outside of the group, and to seek answers to the questions raised by their decision to leave. This period of soul-searching can be rewarding, but it is an arduous process, and family members should be available for support and encouragement. Most people who leave cults benefit greatly from post-cult counseling sessions. Others need more intensive help, and may seek psychotherapy or spend time in a halfway house like Wellspring Retreat http://wellspringretreat.org/, in Ohio, or MeadowHaven, in Massachusetts. http://www.meadowhaven.org/.

A person who walks out of a cult needs to reconnect with the world and with himself. Remind your loved one that knowledge is power and that emotions tell us important things about reality. Encourage him to educate himself by reading and reflecting, and to get in touch with his feelings—for example, by venting frustration in appropriate ways. The more he opens up to you, the sooner both of you will be able to identify any lingering problems.

Deal with common ex-member problems

The healing process can vary from person to person. For some people, making plans to get back to work or school as quickly as possible is a good decision. For most people, taking time to work through their problems is best. With the support of family and friends, they don't have to rush their healing process. Many ex-members want to help friends still in the cult, or assist other families who are dealing with a cult involvement.

Soon after I left the Moonies, and despite my parent's initial protests, I decided to help others to re-evaluate their cult involvement. I found helping people to get out of the Moon cult was a real benefit in my own recovery. With each case, I was able to free myself a little more from the cult mindset. Listening to other people spout the Moonie rhetoric was very liberating. I am glad that I could turn a negative personal experience into a positive one. My hope is that this book will inspire other former members to heal themselves, and reach out to help others.

Depression, nightmares, panic attacks

Former cult members suffer from a variety of difficulties as a result of the cult's manipulations. Most cult members feel depressed during the first few months of post-cult life. Some compare the experience to falling head-over-heels in love, only to realize that their lover was two-faced and exploited them. Others liken their involvement to a spiritual rape. Without proper counseling, they can still harbor phobias and a fragmented sense of self.

Nightmares are a common symptom. In severe cases, a person will experience panic and anxiety attacks. Some develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Psychosomatic symptoms such as headaches, allergies or asthma can make matters worse.

Ex-members who feel tricked, used, and psychologically defeated may lose all hope for a better future. Family members can encourage a balanced perspective. Remind them that other people have made it through situations that were perhaps even more painful. Point out how the experience can also make them stronger and wiser. Be patient. It is common for the family to urge the person to *just get over it*. Cult involvement isn't something that heals quickly. Each recovery moves at its own speed.

Encourage independent decision-making

Cult members are expected to surrender autonomy, and often must ask

permission for routine activities, like using the bathroom. As a result, ex-members can agonize over the smallest of decisions—what to eat, wear, read; even when to sleep. After an intervention, they sometimes shift their devotion from a cult leader to a counselor or other Team member. Friends and family should be sensitive to possible tendencies toward dependence or transference of loyalty.

It is very common for ex-members to ask for direction and advice. Ex-members are frequently caught in the *one right way* mode of thinking. Since one of your goals is to help your loved one act independently, be sensitive and gently encourage him to make his own choices. Avoid the urge to tell him what to do. Instead, ask, *What do you want to do?* or *Which do you think is the better choice? Why?* Encourage him to decide for himself and to learn from the experience.

Psychological strength

Long term members often exhibit psychological impairments, such as a loss of concentration or memory. When I first left the Moon cult, I had great difficulty just reading a book. I had to retrain my brain–by reading, re-reading, and looking up words I had forgotten–to process information on my own. Like an atrophied muscle, the mind needs exercise to restore its former level of performance.

Trust

Ex-members sometimes feel that they can never trust anyone again—least of all themselves. They fear intimacy and avoid commitment to people, jobs, and even hobbies, because they worry about taking another emotional risk. They need to have the tools to assess new people and situations, and to understand that when they were recruited into a cult, they didn't have those tools. They need to forgive themselves.

Shame and guilt

At first, I didn't want people to know about my two years as a Moonie. I felt guilty about the lies I had told and things I had done as a Moon leader—especially to the people I had recruited. It was hard for me to face how much pain I had caused my family and friends.

Cult members should know that it is normal to regret having participated in harmful or unethical activities. They should also realize that it is common to miss aspects of cult life, whether it is old comrades or the

feeling of being involved in something special. The desire to help people who are still in the group needs to be balanced with the need to get on with one's own life. It is imperative that ex-members develop a strong grounding so they can't be drawn back into the cult mindset.

Fear

Some cults teach their members that people who leave the group are the enemy. While such intimidation should be taken seriously, actual incidents of violence are rare. Fear of negative publicity usually keeps the group from retaliating. Ex-members need to realistically appraise the potential for retribution. Here they might draw upon the discussion of phobias in Chapter Ten. In addition, I recommend they read *The Gift of Fear* by Gavin DeBecker.[78] An expert on violence and security issues, De Becker teaches how to assess the warning signs in dangerous situations and encourages people to pay attention to their intuition.

Floating

The extreme identity confusion caused by membership in a cult can follow an ex-member for years, causing flashbacks in which the person *floats* back to the time of their involvement. The cult identity can be triggered by an image, sound, or smell which was instrumental in their manipulation. During my first year out of the cult, the word *moon* would cause me to think *Father*, and see an image of Sun Myung Moon. At that point, I would begin to see the world again from the cult member's perspective.

This dissociative state, which is known as *floating*, can be a significant obstacle for former cult members. Involuntary episodes are most common among people who were exposed to trance-inducing techniques, such as chanting, meditation, visual fixation, repetitive procedures and speaking in tongues. These episodes can be frightening for those who don't understand destructive influence. People who leave a cult without counseling are often confused and terrified by the experience, and may feel irrational guilt and fear for having left.

Undo the triggers

The initial panic of floating can usually be alleviated with a firm self-reminder that it is a natural symptom and is curable. To gain control over

floating, it is necessary to identify the trigger, which could be internal (a thought or mental image) or external (a person or place). The next step is to learn a new response to the trigger by systematically calling forth the stimulus and creating a different association. For instance, I would repeat the word *moon* over and over, visualize the moon, and say to myself, *The earth has only one natural satellite, the moon*. By reinforcing the actual meaning of *moon* rather than the cult connotation, I was able to neutralize and re-associate the trigger that caused floating.

A trigger is an anchor for an experience and can involve one or more of the five senses. Fortunately, the mind is capable of one-trial learning. Ex-members need to become conscious of how they process information, using the five senses:

1. Visual images can be *associated–where you relive the experience–* or *dissociated* –Where you watch yourself as an observer. They can be seen in color or black-and-white, in focus or out of focus, in two or three dimensions, and from assorted perspectives–larger, smaller, from below, or from above. To neutralize a visual trigger–for example, a picture of the cult leader–the member might imagine *watching himself* looking at it (dissociated image), rather than looking at it *directly* (associated image). He can also practice adjusting the color, focus, and size.

2. Auditory information includes words, volume, tone, speed, timbre, and voice. Some ex-cult members cannot listen to certain pieces of music—for example, Mozart sonatas that were played by the cult. When I first left the Moonies, I could not listen to a Korean accent without becoming upset. The key to undoing auditory triggers is, first, to become conscious and, next, to make healthy associations—for example, by attending a Mozart concert with good friends, or by speaking to Koreans who are not cult members.

3. Kinesthetic (tactile, feeling and movement) information is registered as pleasure or pain, heat or cold, smooth or rough, internal or external. A kinesthetic trigger might be bowing from the waist or praying while sitting on one's knees. It could be a particular yoga posture, like the lotus position. By becoming aware and forming new associations—performing those actions in new settings with a different frame of mind—we neutralize such triggers.

4. Olfactory (smell) information can be positive or negative, interesting or dull, sweet or sour. Olfactory triggers include the smell of foods, incense, scented candles. If a cult member worked in a fish-processing plant, it might be the smell of fish.

5. Gustatory information (taste) may be positive or negative, spicy or bland, sweet or tart. Cult members often develop aversions to foods they ate when in the cult. For me it was fast food, like McDonald's Big Mac, and Korean foods, such as kimchi. As with the other senses, a person can identify olfactory and gustatory triggers and make new associations.

This technique for undoing triggers is especially relevant to loaded language. Encourage your loved one to write down common cult words he finds himself using. Then ask him to go to a good dictionary and find the real definition of the words.[79] It's better to form new associations rather than merely avoiding certain words. Especially for those who were in cults for many years, neutralizing the cult terms and using regular words will help speed up the recovery process, because language tends to lock in experience.

Ex-members will also benefit by making a conscious effort to use words that are productive. Depending on how it is framed, even well–meaning self-talk, like *Don't think that you're stupid* or *Don't worry that people are coming to get you*, can have the opposite effect. A more effective approach is to think in the positive, for example, by remembering one's intellectual achievements or reassuring oneself that one knows how to protect oneself.

Overcome black–and–white, all–or–nothing thinking

If you observe your loved one exhibiting cult thinking, such as making black-and-white, all–or–nothing statements, gently point it out to him. It takes time for former members to realize that the world also contains many shades of gray, and a full spectrum of color. Gently point out other possibilities if you see the ex-member looking for another set of absolute answers to fill the void created by cult membership.

Don't dismiss spiritual experiences

Family and friends should be careful never to dismiss, minimize, or put down so-called spiritual experiences or miraculous experiences. A more effective response is to discuss alternative interpretations. Show how other

ex-members you have talked with or heard about came to understand their cult experiences.

Nurture the authentic self

Families should encourage the former member to recover his authentic self: his true values, beliefs, dreams, and goals. If the person disapproves of his pre-cult self, it is probably because the authentic self has not yet been fully realized. In these cases, a family member may help the loved one to build a new identity he can be proud of.

Restoring the authentic identity includes dealing with losing he sense of being part of an elite group. Ex-members often miss the euphoria associated with cult beliefs–that they were saving the world, creating the kingdom of heaven on earth, or achieving enlightenment or superhuman powers. However, there are healthy substitutes for that emotional feeling. When the energy and enthusiasm of an ex-member is channeled in positive directions, he often finds true fulfillment. Maybe the person will find a benevolent, humanitarian organization that actually accomplishes some of the goals that motivated the person to join a cult in the first place.

Ex-members need to know there is nothing defective about them. They should be reminded that there are millions of others who have gone through similar experiences. They should understand that when they joined the group, they made what they believed was the best choice. Now they know more: they understand destructive influence. They know what questions to ask, which behaviors to watch out for, and how to depend on friends and family for reality–testing.

Modeling

Modeling can enable a person to examine and change behavior by helping to identify patterns and psychological roadblocks. It is useful, for instance, to be able to recognize and articulate the difference between what you *do not* want (a mediocre job) and knowing what you *do* want (a fulfilling career). This distinction is related to a person's motivational style, which, as we've discussed, can be either defensive (moving away from a negative) or assertive (moving toward a positive). Both strategies are natural and valuable, but assertive motivation is by far the best in allowing a person to break out of a rut and grow as a person. Former cult members should be asked to identify their own style and work on developing a style that moves towards the positive. When setting goals, it is good to consider short- and long-term consequences.

When an ex-member feels stuck, this feeling is often related to their personal locus of control. Do they have an external reference (like an authority figure) or an internal reference for direction in life? Even when a former member rejects his group's leadership, he can still harbor subconscious loyalty to a leader or surrogate authority figures. An essential step in breaking free from cult mind control is developing an internal locus of control that allows the person to make his own informed choices.

Time orientation is another perspective that former members should consider. It is impossible for a former member to heal if he feels stuck in the past (memories of cult life) or the present (adjusting to post-cult life). Family members should empower their loved one to see life not just in terms of the present, but of the short and long-term future. Visualizing the positive possibilities in each will help them to identify worthwhile and achievable goals.

Insight can also be gained by working with the various parts of a person's identity, or subpersonalities, that were used to create the cult identity. If the idealist part of an ex-member's identity was used to manipulate him, he may end up adopting an extremely cynical attitude if this subpersonality is neglected after cult involvement. A former member can begin the process of self-discovery by seeking out, accepting, and communicating with different subpersonalities. For example, an ex-member whose *hero* part was co-opted by the cult must learn to value the good intentions represented by this subpersonality, such as fighting for one's beliefs. At that point, he can begin to integrate the hero into a post-cult identity.

A powerful self- healing strategy

I believe that one must learn to control one's own mind. The following exercise is one of the most important and effective self-healing strategies that I have encountered. Practice it in a step-by-step manner.

Step One

First, the former member starts by writing a detailed outline of his cult experience—in essence, a timeline beginning before his recruitment and ending with his departure from the group. This timeline should include both positive and negative events, as well as people, places, and activities. By recording all of these memories, the person will be in a better position to process their involvement. Once the outline is in place, the ex-member should sort through his notes to trigger memories of additional positive,

negative, and curious or strange experiences. The aim is to recover thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that might have been ignored or repressed while he was in the cult, and to assess values and beliefs that were distorted by the group.

Step Two

With this outline as a guide, former members visualize the scene of their recruitment from a dissociated or *observer* perspective, as if they were watching themselves on television. This differs dramatically from remembering it from an associated perspective—directly reliving what they saw and felt at the time. Knowing that they can take control of their memories–and can choose to remember them from an observer perspective —is very powerful. Ex-members come to realize that they do not need to re-experience their cult self with each memory. The observer point of view should be the default setting for their cult experiences–the one that occurs automatically. If a person wants to re-experience the cult thoughts and feelings, all they need to do is step into the picture again.

Step Three

The next step is perhaps the most significant part of the healing technique. I suggest the client go back in time to crucial moments in his involvement and relive them–with the new information, resources, and perspectives that he now has. During this exercise, keep in mind that these negative things happened to a younger you; you did the best you could at the time based on your knowledge and abilities; now, you are older, wiser, and have more resources about cult practices.

By imagining how they would have acted differently, a person can integrate the new resources into the cult identity. For example, the cult member might imagine a different response to the cult recruiter. Instead of saying, *That sounds fascinating!* they tell the person, *I'm not interested!* or *Leave me alone! or Go away before I expose the group publicly*. A critical piece in my own healing was going back to re-live a moment when Moon was telling leaders that there would come a time when the Constitution would be amended to make it a capital offense for people to have sex with people other than the one assigned to them. Instead of agreeing wholeheartedly with Moon, I needed to tell Moon in front of the other leaders how crazy he was, and that I would never participate in a mass genocide, and that I was leaving the group. It felt so good to imagine that I could confront Moon and persuade other leaders to leave the group that it

helped transform and integrate my cult identity with my pre-cult and present self.

This technique of re-visualizing past problems with the added resources of the present is very effective. Cult members who have issues that stem from their childhood can envision the younger self claiming and exercising their personal power. When necessary, they can work through major developmental stages to gain positive experiences. They can return to past experiences with their mother, father, siblings, and friends so that they can learn to accept the mistakes of the past.

Ease the transition to life outside the cult

The first year after leaving a cult should be viewed as a transitional period of healing where few (if any) major commitments–such as marriage or joining the military–are made. An ex-member must take one step at a time, and avoid taking on too much in an attempt to make up for lost time. Instead, they should plan manageable, practicable tasks and fulfill them, developing self–confidence as they go.

When a former member seems to be struggling for direction in post–cult life, vocational or pastoral counseling is a good choice. Many ex-members need practical advice about writing their resumes, selecting schools to attend and subjects to pursue, how to make new friends, and how to communicate–in particular, how to talk about their cult experience. Open and supportive discussions with family and friends can help a loved one overcome the stigma of having been in a cult.

With the passage of time, former cult members will grow stronger and live happier, more fulfilled lives. I believe that a key to a successful recovery depends on remembering, and reintegrating, the cult experience, rather than repressing it. Former members can take pride knowing that they have struggled for, and won, something very precious. It is my hope that everyone who has ever had a cult experience will never forget or deny that it really happened. It is by remembering that we may preserve freedom and work to make the world a better place.

SUMMARY:

The main focus of the Strategic Intervention is to inspire the family and other Team members to do mini-interactions. It is hoped that these will motivate the cult member to seek out information–talk with former members, research on the Internet, or arrange to meet qualified

professionals. Ideally, a loved one will leave the group after a series of successful mini-interactions, and there will be no need for an intervention. If after many interactions your loved one is still firmly entrenched in the group, you may want to consider a formal, three-day intervention.

The goal of an SIA intervention is to provide information and perspectives that were not previously available to the member; to promote informed choice; to enable him to re-evaluate his commitment and make his own decision. Let me emphasize again that it is not to force your loved one to leave the group! You should not attempt an intervention without guidance from a professional who has the necessary skills, information, and objectivity to guide the process.

Planning an intervention has many facets:

- Select the Team
- Approach your loved one
- Customize the approach
- Find alternative strategies
- Resolve financial issues
- Look beyond the intervention

Former cult members need time to readjust to life outside of the group, and to seek answers to the questions raised by their decision to leave. This can be rewarding, but family members should be available for support and encouragement. Most people who leave cults benefit greatly from post-cult counseling sessions- with a focus on empowering the person to think for himself and make independent decisions.

Chapter 13

A Call to Action

My hope is that this book has helped you understand how undue social influence and, in particular, how controlling people and destructive cults work. Years of firsthand experience has shown me the enormous misery and suffering they cause. Even more important, I hope this information will encourage you to take concrete actions to help your loved one and others in similar situations.

Today, we face threats from destructive groups that in the past we might not have labeled as cults, but these groups are wielding undue and destructive influence across the globe and across our technological platforms. I am especially worried about the dangers presented by the rise of fundamentalist and extremist religious groups and the increasingly malicious misuse of the Internet. These groups and others can get onto the web and have an immediate global audience. In order to combat this ability, we must also acquire a more global perspective, focusing on our mutual interdependence and our survival as a species and as the keepers of our planet.

Fortunately, those involved in the fundamentals of the technology understand the threat to our privacy and security by groups and individuals who twist the truth. Mitch Kapor, a pioneer in the software industry, serves on the Advisory Board of Wikimedia. “The battlefield has moved,” says Kapor, “to sites where most people now search for trusted information (the Internet and, specifically, Wikipedia).”

Destructive cults have become very sophisticated, says Kapor, using the Internet to manipulate and recruit innocent people. This is contrary to the spirit of online institutions like Wikipedia, which strive for openness and freedom.

Wikipedia, for instance, discourages editing by partisans and endeavors to present balanced, neutral points of view. When members of Transcendental Meditation (TM) or the Moonies or Scientology manipulate information on Wikipedia, Kapor says people’s faith in the Internet is exploited. Because of this, Wikipedia has taken the unusual step of banning Scientologists from editing articles.[80]

Social influence is everywhere and there needs to be a way to help people to easily discern what is happening, how it works and how to detect and protect themselves from negative influence. Alan W. Scheflin, professor of law at Santa Clara University, is an expert on legal ethics, memory, suggestion, hypnosis and mind/behavioral control. He has developed a model showing social influence on a continuum–from the relatively harmless type we find in advertisements to the most extreme, destructive cults. Certain corporations behave in a cult-like manner; employees are expected to dress and speak the same, to honor the corporate doctrine and management. In board meetings, people may not speak up for fear of losing their jobs and there is a natural tendency toward groupthink.

Those examples are on the mild end of the continuum–less dangerous than cults but, to the extent that people are afraid of losing their jobs, creating an environment of dependency and fear.

As my friend, colleague and mentor, Professor Alan Scheflin, points out, any time two people interact, there is social influence.[81] (An innocuous example: Research has shown that people are highly affected by those around them in deciding what and how much to eat. Dining with gluttons, in other words, produces gluttony. Dining with vegetarians may inspire a shift toward vegetarianism.) There is nothing *inherently* wrong or evil about influence. It is the way we communicate with each other. The task is to recognize social influence and decide whether it is, in a particular instance, being used neutrally or as a force for good or for evil. While there is social influence in organized religion, it is usually a force for good by encouraging the convert to fulfill his or her full potential.

Indeed, social influence is everywhere and we need a way to help people to easily discern what influence is occurring, how influence works and how to detect and protect ourselves from negative influence. Professor Scheflin is an expert on legal ethics, memory, suggestion, hypnosis and mind/behavioral control. He has developed a Social Influence Model (SIM) which accommodates the fact that social influence is on a continuum–from the relatively harmless type we find in advertisements to the most extreme, destructive efforts to robotize the human mind and destroy individual freedom.

Malignant social influence occurs in individual settings. A charismatic person may have the ability to convert a free–thinking subject into an unthinking disciple. Malignant social influence also occurs in group settings, often with no religious overtones. Certain corporations behave in a cult-like

manner. Employees are expected to dress and speak the same, to honor the corporate doctrine and management. In board meetings, people may not speak up for fear of losing their jobs. Or even worse, some people may not speak up because they have lost the ability to disagree.

These corporate examples are on the milder end of the continuum—less dangerous than closed cults—but, to the extent that people are afraid of losing their jobs, these corporations purposely create an environment of dependency and fear that is ultimately not beneficial to the employees.

Professor Scheflin, has convinced me of the importance of developing terminology that is academically exact and useful in courts of law. So he argues that, instead of the term "brainwashing", we should use the term "extreme influence" or "undue influence."

Occasionally, evil intentions appear behind what the untrained eye sees as benevolent. I'm thinking of the case of a 70-year-old widow whose rabbi introduced her to a man claiming to be a direct descendant of Moses. This man, who said he was channeling God through Kabbalah, was charging her several thousand dollars in cash for each mezuzah (a Jewish scroll in a case put on doorposts) and telling her she needed to move to Israel. Fortunately, her daughters and a close friend helped this highly intelligent woman escape from this man's influence. These otherwise worldly people made the common mistake of trusting a misguided figure.

One of my greatest fears is the possible abuse of influence techniques by dictators who could impose their will and set up a totalitarian government. If a handful of people connect with each other and agree to some type of totalitarian vision, it could cause a serious interruption in our continuing evolution toward greater harmony. Our own government intelligence agencies need to be aware of the power of destructive influence in order to protect U.S. citizens.

But far from being a corrective force, at times the government seems to be an unwitting dupe of cults. For example, more than a dozen lawmakers attended a congressional reception in 2004 honoring Sun Myung Moon. At that ceremony, Moon declared himself the Messiah and said his teachings helped Hitler and Stalin to be reborn as new persons; a frightening declaration for our representatives not to denounce.

Another example is the Iranian protest group led by Maryam Rajavi, called the Mujahedeen Khalq or Warriors of God. Elizabeth Rubin, a contributor to the *New York Times Magazine,* maintains that the group is in fact a cult.[82] Rubin writes that "an unlikely chorus of the group's backers

—some of whom have received speaking fees, others of whom are inspired by their conviction that the Iranian government must fall at any cost—have gathered around Mujahedeen Khalq at conferences in capitals across the globe.

"Indeed, the Rajavis and Mujahedeen Khalq are spending millions in an attempt to persuade the Obama administration, and in particular Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, to take them off the national list of terrorist groups," Rubin writes. "Mujahedeen Khalq is not only irrelevant to the cause of Iran's democratic activists, but a totalitarian cult that will come back to haunt us."

The Moonies own a gun factory, the *Washington Times* newspaper, a Sheraton Inn in Connecticut, and substantial property in Manhattan as well as in Pyeongchang, Korea, where the 2014 Winter Olympics Games will be held.[83] They have a formidable presence in Washington, and are determined to see that the Unification Church is not hampered by U.S. law or tax policies.

Scientology is not given religious status in Germany, which means there is no exemption from taxes. Scientologists are also forbidden from working in the civil service in Germany (in Russia, the organization is simply banned). But in the U.S., Scientology won its 26-year case against the IRS in December 1997, meaning that taxpayers are allowing an exclusion from taxes to help fund an organization that seems to meet many of the tests of destructive influence. Many people have been prompted to ask why the U.S. doesn't take a less permissive view of this organization. But the government will not even justify or explain the exemption from tax.

For the most part, our legal institutions have not kept pace with social developments. In most states, a person over 18 who is being held by a cult cannot be compelled to return home or be detained for his or her own safety, even by the parents or spouse. Legitimate religions are often reluctant to intervene when a person is trapped in a destructive relationship. The educational and medical systems, up to and including post-graduate studies, are also failing us by virtually ignoring the subject of social influence and destructive relationships as a legitimate area of study.

What do exist are private organizations and individuals who are working to educate the public, help people escape and understand the influence of cults. My website, freedomofmind.com, has a growing database of numerous of resources: news articles, videos, references, case studies, suggestions, and testimonials about groups which literally span the spectrum of geography and belief. Other brave pioneers proceed without institutional

backing or financing—just because they themselves have had a brush with a destructive cult, and they would like to spare others the experience.

Over the past ten years, I have seen more long-term members and even people born inside cult groups, escape than ever before—a testament to the strength of the human spirit. Many other cult members want to leave the groups, but don't know where to go. Their families, who may not understand that their loved one is under cult control, may have cut them off because they were so hurt by their past actions and inaction (like responding to a dying mother's last wish to see them one last time). I believe there are many long-term cult members who would walk out the minute they had a viable alternative, a job and a place to stay. Rejoining society and the workforce is difficult for someone who has been in a cult for twenty or thirty years. With the current economic environment, it is even harder to leave and start over again without help.

My fellow former cult members can be the most helpful in overcoming the ignorance surrounding destructive cults. Imagine the impact if thousands of engaged and educated former cult members started speaking openly about their experiences. Whenever a comment was made promoting a negative stereotype about cult members, they could share the real story of our susceptibility we all are to destructive influence, and how treacherous the world of cults is. As I've said here, verbal and physical abuse of cult members is all too common, and can push members ever deeper into the group by reinforcing the cult belief that the outside world is evil. By speaking out about their experience, we will all learn to protect ourselves better and cult members may also overcome their residual feelings of shame or embarrassment.

There are many ways we might create a safer world for our children and stop cults from so easily using the powerful tools of destructive influence to recruit new members.

Local activist groups

If every city had an activist group with a website (featuring, among other things, a list of cult groups in the area), hot line, and support group, it would help tremendously. Former cult members and their families would be among the group's greatest resources. Those who want to remain anonymous could stay in the background–for example, offering advice over the Internet, or providing financial help to those on the front lines. One project of my Freedom of Mind Resource Center is to co-ordinate the efforts of activist groups. A future project will be to train activists in the Strategic Interactive Approach. Activist groups could coordinate their efforts with police, civic

organizations, mental health professionals, religious institutions, and organizations in other cities.

Local missing persons bureau

Some cults, such as the Jim Robert's group, The Brethren, move their members around the country nomadically so that they cannot be found by their families. I would like to see a system for distributing *missing person* alerts, with pictures and vital information. If someone's loved one is known to be in a particular city, members of that city's activist group could try to locate him.

Possible government actions:

A Consumer bureau

I would like to see a governmental agency which fields complaints about non-profit organizations. Any institution that benefits from tax-exempt status should be held accountable for its activities. Citizens should not have to subsidize institutions that practice deception, mind control, and fraud. If a group abuses basic human rights, such as those espoused in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it should not be tax-exempt.

Investigate cult lobbies

It is my sense that the big cults are exerting significant political influence through their lobbying efforts. We need to keep an eye on these groups just as we do on the relationships between corporations and our government representatives. An investigation into how cult groups are trying to affect specific legislation may be a place to start.

Public disclosure of past research

Over the past six decades, the government, and particularly the CIA, has done a huge amount of research, much of it clandestine, in the area of mind control. The results of their research should be made public. There is a lot to learn about how to protect our children from mind control and undue influence. Elected representatives must investigate the experiments and the results, and report their conclusions.

More funding for *open mind* research

I would like to see more federally funded research on what I call the epidemiology (literally, the study of disease origins and patterns) of cults. Like smoking, drinking, or bird flu, destructive influence is dangerous to a person's physical and mental health. It should be treated as a public health threat, with surveys undertaken to ascertain prevalence not only nationally, but in specific at-risk populations. For example, a study of college campuses might ask how many students have belonged, or been exposed, to a cult. (I predict the numbers would be shockingly high.) In Britain, universities ban cult recruiters from their campuses, because of similar research. Another at-risk group is the elderly, a population that is growing at unprecedented rates. In the 24/7 world we inhabit, increasing numbers of people are sleep deprived, which make them especially vulnerable to undue social influence. Recent research asserts that adults need, on average over 8 hours of sleep a day.

Public awareness

Based on the research findings, the government could launch a campaign to raise awareness about cults, just as it has done for smoking, seat belts, and drunk driving. Billboards, radio spots, television and newspaper ads might save lives and greatly decrease the social cost of cult groups. To raise everyone's awareness of the issues, we tried to introduce legislation to make November 18 *Cult Awareness Day*, in remembrance of Leo J. Ryan and hundreds who died in Jonestown, Guyana. Until there is government action, parents need to have educational resources to help inoculate their children against being "infected" by destructive influence.

Actions by Mental Health Professionals

Psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, mental health counselors, drug and alcohol counselors, suicide prevention consultants, social psychologists and family therapists generally agree there is a need for more research on destructive influence.[6] The scope of the problem needs to be exposed. Existing treatments need to be evaluated and refined, and new ones, like the SIA, developed and implemented.

Professionals should ask their clients whether they have been, or currently are, involved with a controlling group. There is no doubt that most current and former cult members are not getting proper treatment. Many are inappropriately diagnosed and medicated, reinforcing the cult phobia that members will go crazy or be treated as such when they leave the cult.

Former cult members–particularly those who have experienced prolonged states of altered consciousness, such as excessive meditation—

should be administered psychological tests, including testing for dissociation and dissociative disorders. It would be interesting and valuable to learn whether people who are experiencing similar symptoms—such as headaches or seeing auras—practiced the same meditative techniques. Such knowledge could be used to develop new and more specific methods of treatment. It is also important to recognize that there are meditation techniques which can be quite beneficial.

Basic research into social influence

I predict that a study of in-patients in psychiatric hospitals would reveal that a surprising percentage have been involved in a destructive cult. Research confirming this hypothesis is vital since such patients could be more susceptible to suicidal behavior due to cult phobias. I would like to see surveys of suicides and suicide attempts include questions to access how many are linked to a cult involvement.

I would also be curious to know how many prison inmates have been exposed to destructive influence through abusive families, gangs, or cults. Gang activity is worrisome to many and not enough study has been done to see how our current approaches to cult members might translate to helping gang members distance themselves from the destructive influence of their gang.[84]

Perhaps the one area of scientific research that holds the greatest promise for demonstrating the scope of social influence is functional brain imaging (FMRI). We need more evidence of how influence affects the brain. Identifying affected brain regions would provide evidence of the power of social influence, and might also suggest therapeutic strategies.

Better diagnosis and treatment of people with "undue social influence" related issues

There need to be more facilities modeled on the WellspringRetreat.org and Meadowhaven.org which has pioneered therapy to help those who were subjected to mind control.[85] I have recommended these programs to many people, who later reported that they benefited greatly from their participation. They have largely existed through financial support from Christians and former clients. There need to be many more residential facilities where people from all faith and humanist orientations can feel comfortable.

More holistic treatment of patients with cult histories

I believe that holistic approaches can be very effective in helping ex-cult members. Art and music therapies are non-verbal means for expressing emotion and may be effective for releasing painful memories. Massage therapy, which helps people get in touch with their bodies, could be therapeutic for people who were taught by a cult to deny their feelings, or have had out-of-body experiences. In the hands of a skilled practitioner, patients would pay attention to what their body is feeling, become aware of areas of tension, and learn to relax. Secular meditation techniques can also be useful in calming anxieties and bringing focus, but they should be practiced alongside exercise to avoid 'relaxation induced anxiety.'

Training in the Strategic Interactive Approach

One of my goals in writing this book has been to explain the fundamentals of the SIA. More mental health professionals need to receive training in the Strategic Interactive Approach. While I appeal to all mental health professionals, I would like to make a special plea to those professionals who are also former cult members, especially those with at least a master's degree in counseling. Many will have an ideal background for SIA counseling. Of course, anyone with a dedication to helping others can make a difference. I see a valuable role for people who wish to be consultants and or coaches to help advise and encourage constructive change.

Actions for Religious institutions and clergy:

Preventive education and counseling

Concerned leaders of legitimate faiths should help educate the public. Seminary curricula might include courses on how to counsel people in cults. Religious leaders need to speak out against groups that call themselves religions but have the secrecy and destructive elements of a cult. They might show how extremist Bible cults impugn Christian principles with their unrelenting injunctions and lack of forgiveness. Buddhists might show how individuals like Frederick Lenz, who suggested meditation as a means to money and success, pervert true Buddhist philosophy and practice. Lenz; i.e., Rama–committed suicide and a group of his followers reportedly went into another cult group, rather than return to their families and friends.

Mainstream religions also need to be more proactive about immoral practices in their own groups, for instance the child abuse scandals of the Catholic Church. Mainstream religions should also enter into dialog with

cult experts to ensure that their techniques are not psychologically coercive.

Because we want to protect people's right to choose what they believe, it is important that we avoid scattershot criticisms that merely encourage a reactive, defensive response. As people learn more about influence techniques, they will be able to make specific observations about destructive religious groups. This will help people to make informed decisions about their potential involvement as well as encourage current members to think and act independently.

Ethical proselytizing

Religious leaders could produce guidelines for ethical proselytizing. [86] The guidelines would contain a guarantee that potential converts be provided with a full disclosure of the teachings of the group and the leader's background, a declaration of what membership will entail (for example, fasting, celibacy or overnight vigils), and a guarantee not to harass anyone who is not interested in joining or who wants to leave.

Actions for the Legal Community:

One effective instrument for change is the law. We need to change the impressions of our judicial personnel about when a person is "competent". Laws need to reflect the responsibility that destructive cults have and to design appropriate penalties to discourage leaders from pushing their interests through destructive means. The path to success is a process of educating the public and lawmakers, proposing laws that protect free speech but that inhibit robbing people of their freewill, and then we must train lawyers, judges and victim's-rights advocates to recognize when destructive or undue influence is present.

Hold cults and individuals legally accountable

I would like to see a series of conferences for lawyers and judges to identify whether particular cult practices fall within the limits of the law. There has yet to be a case decided by the Supreme Court that establishes what actually constitutes destructive mind control–for example, whether or not physical coercion is necessary. Nor has it been legally determined whether a majority of experts in the field validate the existence of mind control. Until this happens, the question of whether destructive influence meets the U.S. Supreme Court's test for the admissibility of expert testimony will not be resolved.

New legal measures and procedures

Judges might reconsider how cult members are prosecuted by the legal system. For example, Patty Hearst robbed a bank while under the influence of a cult, but was she really guilty? Was it Patty Hearst or the cult members who kidnapped, raped and indoctrinated her for months into the Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA)?

In the case of cult members whose physical or mental health is at risk, there should be a legal option by which families could gain temporary custody of a adult loved one for the purpose of medical and specialized psychological evaluation.

Citizen involvement in the legal system

We can use some facets of the existing legal system to hold cults accountable. For example, any organization that conducts business is regulated by State and Federal laws on minimum wages and standard working conditions. It would be good to draw attention to cult activities such as a refusal to compensate followers who work in their businesses, failure to pay taxes, and hiding records from their members. People can contact the Attorney General's office or register a complaint with the Better Business Bureau. (Be forewarned that your name may go on the public record when a complaint is filed.)

Legal defense fund[87]

We need a legal defense fund to support people who are courageous enough to challenge destructive groups. Lawyers who are knowledgeable about cults might take cases on contingency (usually 30% of a damages award), so that former cult members who are penniless have legal recourse. Factnet.org has created a database to assist attorneys in litigation with Scientology. Some lawyers with experience in this area might be willing to offer *pro bono* work in addition to their compensated cases. Using the legal system could be the most effective way to expose and stop these groups' activities, but we are underfunded and cults often have vast resources. On top of this, cults all share the common goal of doing everything they can to keep cases that could prevent legal precedent by paying large settlements and obtaining gag orders.

The Media Needs to Step Up

The media have traditionally served as watchdogs, exposing major social

problems and political injustices. They educate, and also motivate people to make personal and societal changes. Unfortunately, in recent years, editorial decisions have been affected by the economics of publishing. In particular, there is a conscious avoidance of cult stories that might result in costly litigation.

The last major magazine cover story was in 1991, when *TIME* magazine published a cover story, entitled "Scientology: The Cult of Greed." Scientology sued *TIME* and ultimately lost. Richard Behar, the author of the piece was found to have done a responsible job of reporting. [88]

The *New York Times* has run major stories exposing the wrongdoings of various cults. *The New Yorker* magazine has not shied away from critical profiles of the leaders of Scientology. National television shows, such as *60 Minutes*, *Dateline*, and *20/20*, have run numerous stories on particular cults. When Oklahoma City was bombed, when David Koresh's compound in Waco was besieged, when 39 members of Heaven's Gate committed suicide, there was intense media coverage. [89]

Unfortunately, the media tend to focus on a cult's wacky beliefs instead of their coercive techniques. Stories typically do not delve into how intelligent people are indoctrinated. [90] In the spring of 2012, I was asked to speak to a class at Harvard's History of Science class, taught by Rebecca Lemov, on "the History of Brainwashing". [91] When I told the students that I became interested in this subject due to my recruitment into the "Moonies" cult, few had any idea what I was talking about. Only one or two students knew about the major cult stories that my generation (I was born in the mid-fifties) take for granted. This is very worrisome.

An Enduring Cause

Any phenomenon that has the power to hurt can also have the power to heal. The knowledge of how to influence people, used ethically and responsibly, can be used to preserve and enhance our individuality. I would like to see a foundation for research and education take shape, and become a repository and organizing body for the many well-intentioned efforts now scattered around the Internet and the globe. If this book, or if, you, the reader, can help to advance this vision into a reality, then our efforts over the past few decades will be rewarded.

It is my fervent hope that after reading this book you will be better able to protect yourself, your family and our society from the dangers of

destructive groups and cults. If you have already lost someone to a controlling person or cult, keep hope with love and persistence from you they can find their way back out.

If I or another experienced expert can help, please reach out. Your loved one is depending on you.

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The bibliography is over 30 pages long and we have decided to keep the cost down of the book and put the bibliography up on the freedomofmind.com web site at:
http://freedomofmind.com/Bibliography.

Here are a few :

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About the Author

Steven Hassan has been on the front lines of the mind control and destructiv cult issue since 1976. He is a licensed Mental Health Counselor and holds Master's degree in counseling psychology from Cambridge College. He als is a Nationally Certified Counselor (NCC). In 1988, he authored the criticall acclaimed book *Combatting Cult Mind Control: The #1 Best-selling Guide t Protection, Rescue and Recovery from Destructive Cults* (Park Street Press favorably reviewed in *The Lancet* and *The American Journal of Psychiatry* This book was published in many different languages.

Mr. Hassan has pioneered a new approach to helping victims of mind control called the Strategic Interactive Approach (SIA). Unlike the stressful and media sensationalized "deprogramming," this non-coercive approach is an effective and legal alternative for families to help cult members. It teaches family and friends how to strategically influence the individual involved in the group. During his years of work he has helped thousands of persons victimized by cult-related mind control. He has provided numerous training workshops and seminars for mental health professionals, educators and law enforcement officers, as well as for families of cult members.

Deceptively recruited into the Moon organization at the age of nineteen while a student at Queens College, Hassan spent twenty-seven months recruiting and indoctrinating new members, fundraising, political campaigning and personally meeting with Sun Myung Moon during numerous leadership sessions. Mr. Hassan ultimately rose to the rank of Assistant Director of the Unification Church at National Headquarters. Following a serious automobile accident, he was deprogrammed by several former members at his parents' request. Once he realized the insidious nature of the organization, he authorized police officials to take possession of his personal belongings which included a massive set of private speeches documenting Moon's secret plan to "take over the world."

During the 1977-78 Congressional Subcommittee Investigation into South Korean C.I.A. activities in the United States, he consulted as an expert witness and turned over to the committee these private speeches. In 1979, following the Jonestown tragedy, Mr. Hassan founded EX-MOON Inc., a non-profit educational organization composed of over four hundred former members of the Moon group. Although now defunct, it was one of the first and largest ex-member organizations in the world.

In 1999, Mr. Hassan founded the Freedom of Mind Resource Center, Inc. as a consulting, counseling and publishing organization dedicated to

upholding human rights, promoting consumer awareness, and exposing abuses of "undue influence" and destructive cult groups. The Web site for FMRC is www.freedomofmind.com and has material being added regularly.

Mr. Hassan has appeared on innumerable television and radio shows including *Nightline*, *60 MINUTES*, *Dateline NBC*, *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, *Good Morning America*, *Today Show*, *CBS This Morning*, and *Larry King Liv*e. Quoted extensively in newspaper and magazine articles, Mr. Hassan has had a great impact internationally on the public. In his commitment to fight against destructive cults, Mr. Hassan devotes a major portion of his time and energy to actively consulting individuals and organizations. He has addressed hundreds of campus, religious and professional organizations throughout the world.

Endnotes

Introduction

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[1] The acronym CARP, which stands for Collegiate Association for the Research of Principles, alludes to a fish, an early symbol of Christianity. To my knowledge, this group never researched anything but, instead, was used to recruit students into the Moonies. For an updated list of entities associated with Moon, please see http://freedomofmind.com/Info/infoDet.php?id=331&title=Moon_organization_-_Detailed_Information_on_Moon_Organization_(aka_the_Unification_Chur

[2] Mckean, Kip. *"They Hated the Dreamer,"* AudioTape #6353, August 1989.

[3] Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5; *Babylonian Talmud* Tractate Sanhedrin 37a

Chapter 1

[4] Taken from the mirror of the original Heaven's Gate site. Heaven's Gate—How and When It May Be Entered www.heavensgate.com

[5] Heaven's Gate Exit press release, ibid.

[6] The Maeders' real names are used with their permission.

[7] Major Offenses and Lesser Offenses.

[8] Lenz took an overdose of Valium and was found drowned, with his dog's collar around his neck, in Conscience Bay, Long Island, on April 13 1998. For more information, see http://freedomofmind.com/Info/infoDet.php?id=154&title=Rama

[9] One of the most volatile controversies in the world of psychotherapy concerns two fallacious viewpoints—the so-called recovered memory camp

(those who believe that most adult problems are the result of repressed childhood sexual abuse) and the false memory camp (those who believe that memories cannot be repressed and, therefore, any newly uncovered traumatic memories must have been implanted by therapists). Both labels are deceiving. First, there is no recognized school of therapy on recovered memory; and second, every memory is recovered–that is what makes it memory. Nor does medicine, or the field of mental health, recognize a false memory syndrome. I do believe that, under certain conditions, false beliefs about the past can be implanted. I have had former cult members tell me that they came to harbor images of experiences that never occurred.

One of the most disturbing developments of the controversy is that it has engendered a strong anti-therapy backlash. Even responsible therapists who tried to help their patients recover from childhood sexual abuse have faced lawsuits. For the most extensive review of this controversy, see Brown, Scheflin & Hammond, *Memory, Trauma Treatment and the Law*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998. See also Brown, Scheflin & Whitfield, *Recovered Memories: The Current Weight of the Evidence*

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[11] Hunt, Morton. *The Story of Psychology*, New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1993, p. 403.

[12] Ibid, p. 411-12.

[13] Packard, Vance. *The Hidden Persuaders.* New York: David McKay, 1965.

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[17] Lifton, Robert Jay. *Destroying the World to Save It : Aum Shinrikyo, Apocalyptic Violence, and the New Global Terrorism*, New York: Metropolitan Books, 1999. See also Zablocki, Benjamin, The Blacklisting of a Concept: The Strange History of the Brainwashing Conjecture in the Sociology of Religion, *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions,* Vol. 1, No. 1, October 1997; Anthony, Dick, & Robbins, Thomas, Law, Social Science and the "Brainwashing" exception to the First Amendment, *Behavioral Sciences and the Law*, Vol. 10, 1992; and Robbins, Thomas & Anthony, Dick, eds, *In Gods We Trust*: *New Patterns of Religious Pluralism in America*. Transaction Press, 1990.

[18] Festinger, Leon, Rieken, Henry W. & Schachter, Stnaley. *When Prophecy Fails: A Social and Psychological Study of a Modern Group that Predicted the Destruction of the World.* New York: Harper & Row, 1956.

[19] My thanks to Reverend Buddy Martin for suggesting the acronym BITE. *Combatting Cult Mind Control* taught the four part model but it wasn't called BITE in that volume.

[20] Dick Joslyn interview, May 26, 1997. With permission of Mr. Joslyn.

[21] Brown, Janelle. A web of their own: Scientologists say their Internet filter protects the faithful. Critics call it "cult mind-control." *Salon Magazine,* July 15, 1998.

[22] NLP was based on modeling the therapeutic techniques of psychiatrist Milton Erickson. One book of many which discuss use of trance is by the founders of NLP, John Grinder and Richard Bandler. See BANDLER, R. & GRINDER, J., Trance-Formations: Neuro-Linguistic Programming and the Structure of Hypnosis CA: Real People Press, 1981.

[23] Investigation of Korean-American Relations. Report of the Subcommittee on International Organizations. U.S. Government Printing Office, October 31, 1978.

[24] This information came to me from cult expert Rev. Robert T. Pardon, M.Div., Th.M., who is the Executive Director of the New England Institute for Religious Research.

[25] Members are told to never reveal their mantra, which is viewed as highly personal and secret (see www.trancent.org/secrets/ checking/steps). However, a list of mantras now published on the internet at www.minet.org/steps reveals that mantras are assigned to initiates according to their age and the year of initiation. In other words, the unique mantra is not unique at all.

[26] West, Louis Jolyon & Martin, Paul. Pseudo-Identity and the Treatment of Personality Change in Victims of Captivity and Cults, in Steven Jay Lynn and Judith Rhue S. (Eds.)*, Dissociation: Clinical and Theoretical Perspectives*, pp. 268-288. New York, NY: The Guilford Press, 1994.

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[28] Schein, Edgar with Schneier, Inge & Barker, Curtis. *Coercive Persuasion.* New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1971.

[29] Available free on the Internet at http://www.somis.org/TDD-01.html.

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[30] Patrick, Ted, with Dulack, Tom. *Let Our Children Go!* New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, Inc., 1976.

[31] Several ex-members of this cult have written books about their involvement. See Williams, Miriam, *Heaven's Harlots: My Fifteen Years As a Sacred Prostitute in the Children of God Cult*.. New York: William Morrow, 1998. Davis, Deborah Berg. *The Children of God: The Inside Story.* Grand Rapids, MI: The Zondervan Publishing House, 1984. Mcmanus, Una. *Not for a Million Dollars.* Impact Books, 1980.

[32] I was involved in about one dozen deprogrammings in 1976 and 1977 for members of the Moonies. Although most of them were successful, two of them were not, and the members returned to the cult. To discredit me, cults presently lie to members and say that I still do deprogrammings,

despite the fact that I have publicly criticized deprogramming since 1980. I have never been arrested, criminally prosecuted, or even sued by anyone I have talked with or counseled. See http://www.freedomofmind.com/Media/Refuting.php for more detailed information.

[33] Available free to members from the International Cultic Studies Association http:// icsahome.com/infoserv_respond/free.asp.

[34] Some exit-counselors now refer to themselves as "Thought Reform Consultants."

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[36] King, Dennis. *Get the Facts on Anyone*. Arco Publications, 1999.

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[38] Norman Geisler Lecture, The Rise of the Cults, The New England Institute for Religious Research, November 2, 1991.

[39] Parry, Robert. *The Dark Side of Reverend Moon: Buying the Right.* Consortium News, 1997.

Chapter Five

[40] Identifying features in this story have been changed to protect my client's privacy.

[41] Gurdjieff was quite a controversial personality. Both men wrote books about a mystical "school" to develop one's spirit. I believe there are other Gurdjieff and Ouspenky "schools" which do not use deception and destructive mind control.

[42] I mentioned this case in Chapter 1.

[43] This is one point where I disagree with Margaret Singer and others. According to my model, the military uses many components of mind control. What the military does not do is deceive a new recruit (some vets have argued with me about this because they said their recruiter lied to them). The structural checks and balances operating in the military provide some protection of an individual's authentic self.

Chapter Six

[44] Online personality assessment at http://www.capt.org/take-mbti-assessment/mbti.htm.

[45] Keirsey, David & Bates, Marilyn. *Please Understand Me: Character and Temperament Types.* Prometheus Nemesis Books, 1984.

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[47] American Bible Society. *The Holy Bible*, revised standard edition, 1994.

[48] Moses, Jeffrey. *Oneness: Great Principles Shared By All Religions*, Fawcett Books, 1992.

[49] Smith, Huston.*The World's Religions.* San Francisco:Harper, 1992.

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[52] A basic book on meditation is Leshan, Lawrence. *How to Meditate: A Guide to Self-Discovery,* New York: Bantam Books, 1984.

Chapter Seven

[53] The Reichmanns kindly gave permission to use their names.

[54] Pardon, Robert & Barba, Judy. *Messianic Communities: Journey from Orthodox to Heresy,* New England Institute of Religious Research, 1995.

[55] JoEllen Griffin's name while in the group was "Diynah." She left with her husband Roger Griffin, who was one of the highest ranking leaders to walk away. For most of his eighteen years in the group, he held the positions of household head, shepherd, teacher, and elder—and, during the last few years there, apostolic worker. Their email address is RGDAD1@aol.com.

[56] For more information about online privacy, see www.epic.org/privacy/tools.html

[57] Kornfield, Jack. *A Path With Heart: A Guide Through the Perils and Promises of Spiritual Life*. New York: Bantam Doubleday, 1993.

[58] Consult my Web site and other counter-cult sites for ways to contact ex-members.

[59] A family that cared enough for a loved one would not go to the lengths of initiating a deprogramming and then stand by and allow a rape or beating to occur. It just wouldn't happen!

[60] Hansen, Susan. Did Scientology Strike Back? *American Lawyer*, June 1997.

[61] See www.zimbardo.com for Professor Zimbardo's full resume.

[62] You can view the video online at http://vimeo.com/

freedomofmind/zimbardo-interviewed-by-steve-hassan.

[63] American Psychiatric Association. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 4th edition. Washington, D.C., 1994.

[64] *The Lancet* and *American Journal of Psychiatry* reviews are on the freedomofmind.com web site.

[65] Reid, T.R. U.S. Visitors Boost Cause of Japanese Cult; Lawyer Says Police Imperil Religious Rights of Sect. *Washington Post Foreign Service*, May 9, 1995; Watanabe, Teresa. Alleged Persecution of Cult Investigated*, Los AngelesTimes*, May 6 1995.

[66] *Milwaukee Journal*, Dec. 3, 1988.

[67] Zablocki, Benjamin, The Blacklisting of a Concept: The Strange History of the Brainwashing Conjecture in the Sociology of Religion*, Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions,* Vol. 1, No. 1, October 1997, p. 98.

[68] Taken from the expert testimony of J. Gordon Melton in Lee vs. Duddy et al. See www.hightruth.com/experts/melton.

[69] See www.freedomofmind.com for more information about these respected doctors.

Chapter Eight

[70] Names and other identifying details have been altered to protect the individual's right to privacy.

[71] Cooper, Paulette. *The Scandal of Scientology.* New York:Tower Publications, 1971.

Chapter Ten

[72] Statistic from the Anxiety Disorders Association of America.

[73] King, Stephen. *Talisman*, New York:Viking Press, 1984; *IT*, New American Library 1990.

[74] Castaneda, Carlos. *A Journey to Ixtlan, New York:*Washington Square Press, 1992; *Tales of Power*, New York:Pocket Books, 1992.

[75] All personal names and identifying characteristics have been changed in this story.

Chapter Eleven

[76] I first learned and used this model of Thinker, Feeler, Doer or Believer as a Moonie in 1974. I've discovered that a person is all four of these, but these orientations can be ranked—for example, believer first, then feeler, doer thinker. Religious cult identities are always believer first, then doer or feeler, and lastly thinker.

[77] Jon Atack was a nine-year Scientology member and reached the 24th of the 27 available levels of the Bridge (OT5). His book, *A Piece of Blue Sky,* is the best ever written on the group. He is a brilliant, multi-talented man who I am proud to call my friend.

Chapter Twelve

[78] De Becker, Gavin. *The Gift of Fear,* Dell Books, 1999.

[79] The act of looking up words in a dictionary will probably be a negative trigger for an ex-Scientologist because the ritual of looking up words is part of the group's method for restructuring thoughts. Nevertheless, I have found that encouraging ex-Scientologists to reclaim the use of language is an indispensable part of their healing.

Chapter Thirteen

[80] Wikipedia bans Scientologists,

http://www.wired.com/epicenter/2009/05/wikipedia-bans-church-of-scientology.

[81] Professor Alan Scheflin,

http://law.scu.edu/faculty/profile/scheflin-alan.cfm

[82] Rubin, Elizabeth

http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/14/opinion/sunday/an-iranian-cult-and-its-american-friends.html?pagewanted=all

[83] Moon owned entities:

http://freedomofmind.com/UCFrontList.php

[84] A very unique, cutting edge model program to aid teens involved in gangs, please see http://www.utec-lowell.org/about.php

[85] Martin, Paul, & Langone, Michael, & Dole, Arthur & Wiltrout, J. Post-cult symptoms as measured by the MCMI before and after residential treatment, *Cultic Studies Journal,* 9, 219-249, 1992.

[86] Thiessen, Elmer John *The Ethics of Evangelism Downers* Grove, IL Intervarsity Press 2011

[87] Legal Defense Fund Factnet.org

[88] Behar, Richard, Scientology: The Thriving Cult of Greed and Power. Ruined lives. Lost fortunes. Federal crimes. Scientology poses as a religion but really is a ruthless global scam. Aiming for the mainstream, *Time Magazine*, May 6, 1991.

[89] In the face of revelations that the FBI did use firebombs on the Branch Davidian compound, even President of the United States Bill Clinton commented that he did not see why people were getting so upset "because a bunch of religious fanatics committed suicide." *New York Times*, August 31, 1999.

[90] I am afraid that very little has been learned since the tragedy at Waco. Six years after the government assault and siege, which resulted in the fiery deaths of men, women and children, a responsible investigation has yet to be accomplished. My efforts during the siege fell on deaf ears. Congressman Joe Kennedy's office sent letters to F.B.I. Director Sessions and Special Agent Jamar in charge of the operation, asking that they talk with me. Massachusetts Attorney General's Scott Harshbarger's office faxed a letter, written by me, to Attorney General Reno warning of the dangers of the situation, and offering concrete alternatives weeks before the final deadly assault. A copy of my book *Combatting Cult Mind Control* was reportedly given to Webster Hubbell by Eleanor Acheson more than a week before the final assault. On television shows and in a lecture at Harvard in 1994, I detailed what could have been done to resolve the standoff peacefully. Six years later, I have yet to receive even a telephone call from anyone in the government asking me for my perspective. A transcript of my Harvard lecture is on www.freedomofmind.com.

[91] Rebecca Lemov's Harvard page is

http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~hsdept/bios/lemov.html